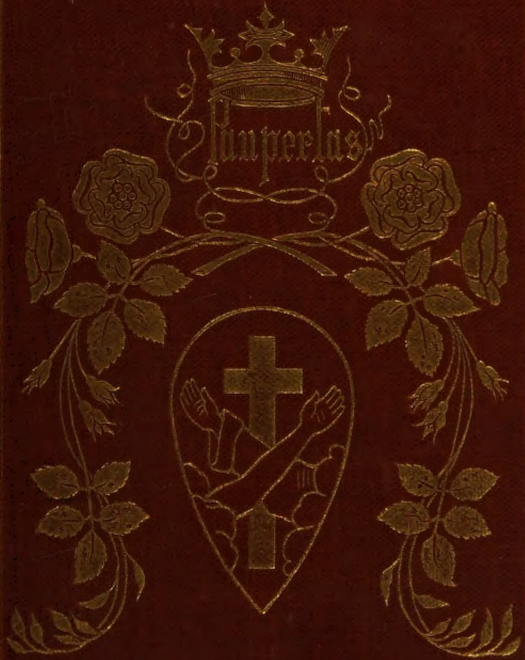
The Lady Poverty



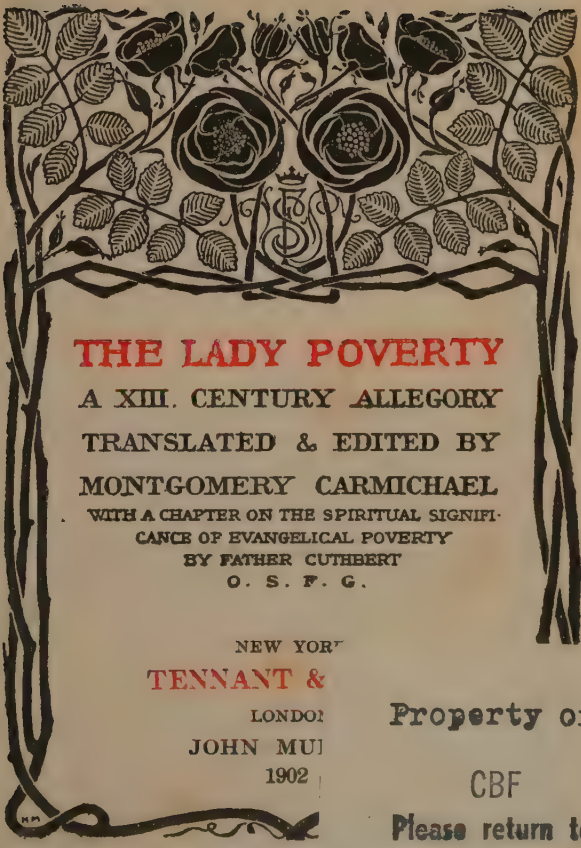
THE LADY POVERTY

✠

"Sacrum Commercium Beati Francisci
cum Domina Paupertate"

Giotto?

The Espousals of S.t Francis to the Lady Poverty.



THE LADY POVERTY

A XIII. CENTURY ALLEGORY

TRANSLATED & EDITED BY

MONTGOMERY CARMICHAEL

WITH A CHAPTER ON THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EVANGELICAL POVERTY

BY FATHER CUTHBERT

O. S. F. C.

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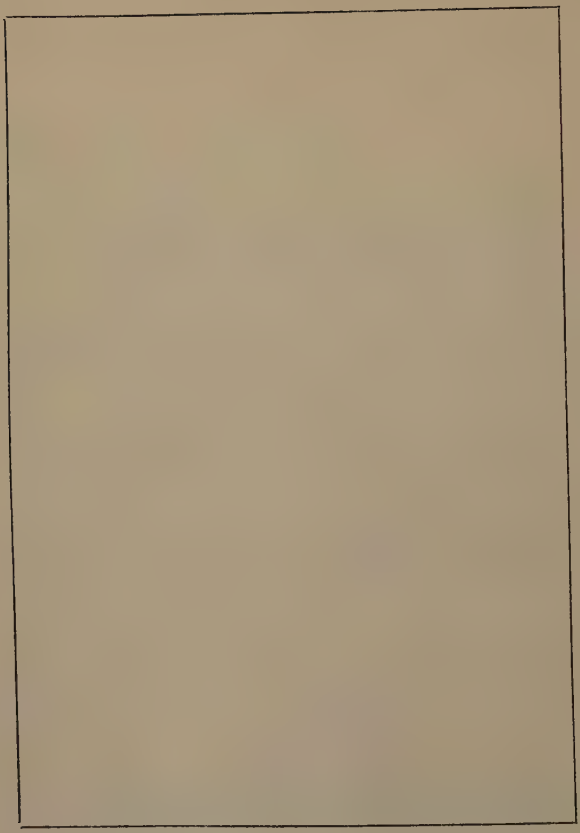
"Beatus qui intelligit super Egenum et Pauperem: in die mala liberabit eum Dominus."—*Ps.* xl. 1.

"Beati Pauperes: quia vestrum est Regnum Dei."—*Luc.* vi. 20.

"Paupertas est, quae Animam in terris positam, facit cum Angelis in Coelo conversari."—*Sanct. Fran. Oraculum* iv.

"Ubi est Paupertas cum Laetitia, ibi nec Cupiditas nec Avaritia."—*Sanct. Fran. Admonit.* xxvi.

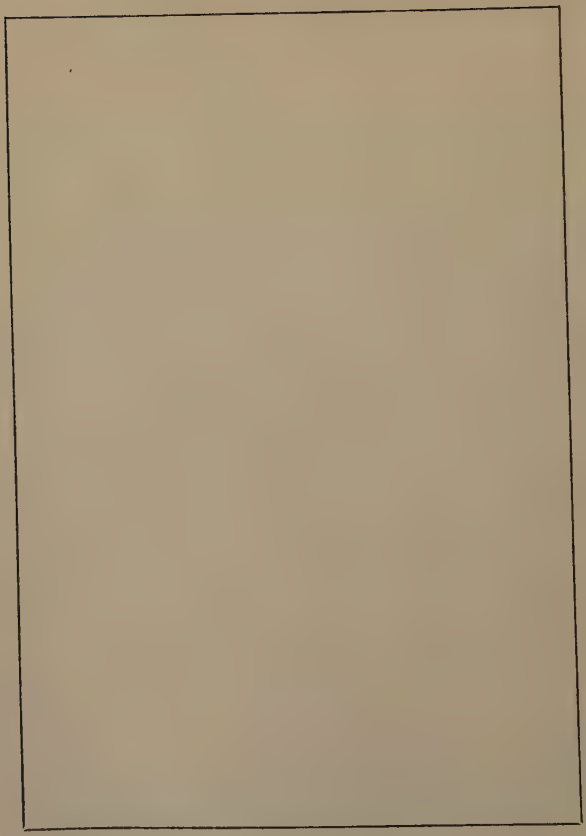


TO

DIVES

THAT HE MAY COME TO BLISS

WITH LAZARUS.



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION—

PAGE

(*a*) Editions xvii

(*b*) Authorship and Date xxviii

(*c*) Translation and Scripture References xlii

THE LADY POVERTY.

I. In Praise of Poverty 3

II. How the Blessed Francis made diligent search for the Lady Poverty . 8

III. How two old men showed the Blessed Francis where he might find the Lady Poverty 14

IV. Of the First Companions of the Blessed Francis 20

PAGE

V. How the Blessed Francis and his Companions found the Lady Poverty on the Mountain . . . .

VI. The Blessed Francis and his Companions, exalting her virtues in divers ways, beseech the Lady Poverty to abide with them forever 28

VII. The Answer of My Lady Poverty . 41

VIII. Of the Apostles 56

IX. Of the Successors of the Apostles . 59

X. That Times of Peace are unpropitious to Poverty 62

XI. Of Persecution 65

XII. Of the followers of a spurious Poverty 70

XIII. Of Avarice 73

XIV. How the Lady Poverty spoke of good Religious 77

PAGE

XV. How Avarice took the Name of Discretion 80

XVI. How Avarice took the Name of Prudence 84

XVII. How Avarice called in the aid of Sloth 89

XVIII. Of the Religious who were conquered by Sloth 92

XIX. How the Lady Poverty sorrowed over certain Religious who were poor in the World, and yet more prone than others to Self-indulgence in Religion 99

XX. How the Lady Poverty showed the Blessed Francis the Perfect Walk in the Religious Life 107

XXI. How the Blessed Francis made answer to the Lady Poverty . 114

XXII. How the Lady Poverty gave her consent 118

PAGE

XXIII. How the Blessed Francis thanked God for the consent of the Lady Poverty 119

XXIV. Of the Sojourn of My Lady Poverty with the Brothers 121

XXV. How My Lady Poverty blessed the Brothers, exhorting them to persevere in the Grace which they had received 130

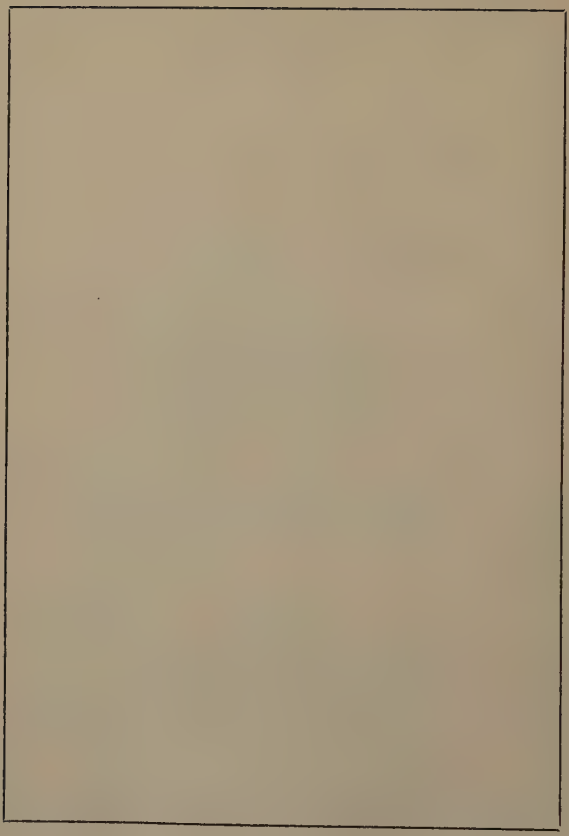
On the Spiritual Significance of Evangelical Poverty, by Father Cuthbert, O.S.F.C. 141

Appendices—

I. A Prayer of the Blessed Francis to obtain Holy Poverty 183

II. Paradiso. Canto XI. (lines 28-123) . 200

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

EDITIONS

THE "Sacrum Commercium" is an Allegory, simple in form and charming in conception, telling how St Francis wooed and won that most difficult of all Brides, my Lady Poverty. It was written some time in the thirteenth century (most probably in the year 1227) by an unknown Franciscan, and has been

six times printed, thrice in Latin, and thrice in Italian.

The Latin Editions.

The first Latin edition was printed at Milan in 1539. It is of exceeding rarity, and has escaped the vigilance of Brunet and Græsse. Père François Van Ortroy, the noted Bollandist (whom few things escape), was the first to call attention to a copy in the Ambrosian Library, and it is the only copy known to exist. (See "Analecta Bollandiana," xix. 460.)

The second Latin edition was published nearly 400 years later, in 1894, under the editorship of Professor Edoardo Alvisi, in the "Collezione di Opuscoli Danteschi inediti o rari diretta da G. L. Passerini."[1] Professor Alvisi's edition has no pretensions to being critical: his sole object in publishing it was to supply an illustration to part of Canto XI. of the "Paradiso." This edition has,

[1] "Nota al Canto XI. (versi 43-75) del 'Paradiso' di Dante Alighieri," Città di Castello, Lapi, 1894, pp. 54.

perhaps justly, been decried for its entire want of critical apparatus, but it at least served to call attention to a gem that had hitherto slumbered uncared-for in parchment Codexes.

The third Latin edition is exceptional from every point of view. It was published only last year by Père Edouard d'Alençon, the learned Archivist General of the Friars Minor Capuchins. Père Edouard has taken his version

from a Codex (No. 3560) in the Casanatese Library in Rome, which he has carefully collated with three other Codexes (of Milan, Vincenza and Ravenna), noting all the variants at foot. There is but one fault to find with this scholarly edition: it does not attempt to give the numerous Scripture references.[1]

[1] "Sacrum Commercium Beati Francisci cum Domina Paupertate, Opus Anno Domini 1227 conscriptum ad fidem Variorum Codicum MS. Adjuncta versione Italica inedita, curante P. Eduardo Alinconiensi, Ord. Min. Capuccinorum Archivo Generali Præposito." Rome, Kleinbub, 1900, 4to, pp. xviii-52.

The Italian Editions.

The first Italian edition[1] appeared in 1847 under the title "Meditazione sulla Povertà di Santo Francesco."[2] It is taken from a Fourteenth-Century Codex in the Franciscan Convent of Giaccherino, near Pistoia. Its editors were the Lexicographer, Pietro Fanfani,

[1] The Italian edition of the Chronicle of Mark of Lisbon (Venice, 1590, vol. ii. pp. 82-92) contains a compendium of the "Sacrum Commercium" which, however, does not merit the name of an edition.

[2] "Meditazione sulla Povertà di Santo Francesco" Scrittura inedita del Secolo XIV. Pistoia, Tip. Cino., 1847, 18mo. pp. 72.

and a Canon of Pistoia, Enrico Bindi. It has been quoted in the great "Vocabolario" of the Academicians of the Crusca, and has therefore become a "Testo di Lingua" or Italian classic.[1] The "Meditazione" is a very free translation indeed from the original Latin. The translator adds beauties and leaves out obscurities at will. It is curious to us in these

[1] See "Bibliografia dei Testi di Lingua a Stampa citati dagli Accademici della Crusca, opera di Luigi Razzolini ed Alberto Bacchi della Lega," 4th Edition. Bologna, 1890.

days, when Franciscan studies are being pursued with such avidity all the world over (if I except England), to reflect that the editors, Fanfani and Bindi, did not know whether the "Meditazione" was a translation or an original work. The Fourteenth-Century translator is unknown.

The next Italian edition (1900) is the one given in parallel columns with the Latin version of Père Edouard d'Alençon's work above

quoted. It is taken from Codex B. 131 in the Vallicellian Library, and is probably a Fourteenth-Century work, but, if interesting, it has little or no merit as an example of fine Tuscan.

The third Italian edition is a much-needed and very welcome work.[1] It is a reprint of

[1] "Le Mistiche Nozze di San Francesco e Madonna Povertà. Allegoria Francescana del Secolo, xiii." Florence, 1901, 12mo. pp. xxiv-70. I cannot help regretting that Don Minocchi has given the work a title of his own choosing, though I recognise the superiority of his title as title. As the "Meditazione" it was christened by the original translator,

the "Meditazione," which has for long been so scarce as to be almost unprocurable. The editor, Don Salvatore Minocchi, a Florentine priest, and one of the foremost authorities on matters Franciscan, than whom there could be no one more fitted for the task, has carefully collated the original edition of the "Meditazione" with the Codex from which it was taken, and has removed quite a host

as the "Meditazione" first published by Fanfani and Bindi, and as the "Meditazione" it has become a Tuscan classic under the ægis of the Crusca.

of erroneous readings. We may therefore now be said to have, for the first time, a correct version of this little Italian classic. It was only printed in the last days of May, and I have to thank the learned editor for courteously permitting me to see his proof sheets.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

THE authorship of the "Sacrum Commercium" has been freely ascribed to the Blessed Giovanni da Parma, seventh Minister General of the Friars Minor in succession to Saint Francis. I would with all my heart that he were the author, for Giovanni is one of the brightest lights of the Order, and both by his love and practice of Poverty, and

by his great endowments, is the ideal author for so exquisite an allegory. The "Chronica xxiv. Generalium," which was completed in 1379, and begun perhaps twenty years earlier, distinctly states that Giovanni is the author ("quendam libellum devotum composuit quem intitulavit Commercium Paupertatis"),[1] and this opinion was followed by all succeeding old writers (except Fra Bartolommeo da

[1] "Analecta Franciscana," vol. iii. p. 283. Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi) 1897, 4to.

Pisa, who makes no attempt to assign authorship), and most moderns, including Professor Alvisi, M. Sabatier,[1] Professor Umberto Cosmo,[2] and the latest biographer of the Blessed, Fra Luigi da Parma.[3] But all the Codexes which Père Edouard d'Alençon cites, as

[1] "Speculum Perfectionis," p. vi., Paris, 1898. But then he is only following Alvisi.

[2] "Le Mistiche Nozze di Frate Francesco con Madonna Povertà," Florence, Olschki, 1898, pp. 58. I have since seen his *Noterelle Francescane*, in the "Giornale Dantesco" (An. ix., Quad. iii.) in which he modifies his opinion.

[3] "Vita del Beato Giovanni da Parma," 2nd Edition. Quaracchi, 1900, pp. 186.

also a Codex in the Bodleian and another in the Communal library at Siena, give the date of composition as the month of July after the death of Saint Francis, that is to say July, 1227. (*Actum est hoc opus mense Julii post obitum Beatissimi Francisci, anno Millesimo ducentesimo vigesimo septimo ab Incarnatione Domini Salvatoris Nostri Jesu Christi.*) If this date be correct, then the Blessed Giovanni could not have been its author,

for he was only born in 1208, and did not enter the Order until after 1230. There is the point that Mediæval scribes were given (like other mortals) to making errors in dates, more especially when they were in Roman figures, and these errors would have been propagated from Codex to Codex. We have the well-known instance of the Mazarin Codex No. 1743, where the erroneous date of 1228 led a distinguished French critic

to look upon the "Speculum Perfectionis" as the oldest biography of St Francis. The date was probably 1318, and it will be seen how easily a slip might be made between MCCXXVIII and MCCCXVIII.[1] But in favour of the date of 1227 for the "Sacrum Commercium" we have not only the fact that the date is written in words and not in figures, but that the "explicit" distinctly

[1] *Cf.* the "Miscellanea Francescana," vol. vii. p. 182.

states that it was finished in the July after the death of St Francis. Such extreme precision does not leave much room for error. Moreover, there is practically no serious internal evidence against the date 1227. It is true that the Casanatese Codex, at the beginning of Chap. iv. speaks of "*Sanctum* Franciscum," whereas St Francis was not canonized until 1228. But this, even if some refuse to translate it simply "the holy

Francis," and insist upon "*St* Francis," I think it is fair to regard as the slip of a scribe, more especially as the Vincenzian Codex gives "beatum" in the same place, and both Italian versions have "beato." There is, therefore, no substantial reason why we may not regard the "Sacrum Commercium" as written in 1227, and it is interesting to note that this little allegory is thus the first book ever written on St Francis, for Thomas of

Celano's "Legenda Prima," was not completed until the following year.[1]

There are, to my mind, two conclusive arguments, both adduced by Père Edouard,[2] against attributing the authorship to Giovanni da Parma. Fra Ubertino da Casale in a

[1] Add to all this that the "Sacrum Commercium" contains not a single citation from the Office of St Francis—which it is natural to suppose that the imaginative writer would have here and there availed himself of—and it seems to me that the date of 1227 is proved with something like certainty, and the date of 1247 excluded beyond a doubt.

[2] *Op. cit.* p. xii. and p. 41 et ss.

famous work[1] ("too famous," it might justly be called), finished in 1305, is the first writer who expressly mentions the "Sacrum Commercium," and he ascribes it merely to "a certain holy doctor," giving no name. Now Ubertino well knew Giovanni (*ob.* 1289), and it seems impossible that he should not also have known and celebrated the Blessed as the author of the "Sacrum Commercium" had he really

[1] The "Arbor Vitæ Crucifixi Jesu," Venice, 1485, fol.

been so. Again Fra Salimbene da Parma (*ob.* 1287 or 1290) knew the Blessed Giovanni intimately, and alludes to him frequently in his Chronicle.[1] He even refers to writings of Giovanni's, but there is never a hint of the "Sacrum Commercium." The only theory on which it is possible to ascribe the authorship to Fra Giovanni is so wild as scarcely to be worthy of mention. We should have to suppose, see-

[1] "Chronica Fratris Salimbene Parmensis." Parma, 1857, 4to, pp. xiv.-424.

ing the unpopularity of the extremes of Poverty in a certain section of the Order, that he was afraid to acknowledge his work, and that he deliberately, and with much circumstance, falsified the date to secure his anonymity. But the Blessed Giovanni was not made of such poor stuff! He who endured hatred, persecution and imprisonment, to some extent by reason of his zeal for the Lady Poverty, was not the man to resort to so trivial a

ruse. His deeds were far more unpopular (with some) than ever this little allegory could have made him.

Père Edouard d'Alençon, with much ingenuity, seeks to credit Giovanni Parenti, St Francis' immediate successor as Minister General (1227-1233), with the authorship. He gives an instance tending to show that there was a tradition that a Minister General had written the work, and then he points to the similarity

between "Joannes Parenti" and "Joannes Parmensis." All this proves his acumen and ingenuity, but he is too severely scientific a scholar to advance a clever theory as proof positive. For the present it is safest to admit frankly that the author of the "Sacrum Commercium" is unknown, and to conclude with Fra Ubertino da Casale that he was "quidam sanctus doctor hujus Sanctæ Paupertatis professor et zelator strenuus."

TRANSLATION AND SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

I HAVE translated from Père Edouard d'Alençon's version of the Codex Casanatensis.[1] But I have not slavishly adhered to this, using, when they seemed more

[1] Let me here render him public thanks for his courteous permission to do so, and make due public acknowledgment of my indebtedness to his critical preface. Had it not been for this scholarly work I must needs have spent months in puzzling out for myself the crabbed hands and crooked abbreviations of three or four fourteenth-century scribes.

apt, the variants which he has so diligently noted at foot. I have also, now and again, used the Italian version of the Codex Vallicellianus, and, though very rarely, even the classic "Meditazione." In my translation I have been no bondsman, but have rendered freely, while seeking to convey accurately the spirit and meaning of the work, and to preserve, as far as that might be, the elemental simplicity of its language.

The "Sacrum Commercium" is a tissue of the words and phrases of St Jerome's beautiful Latin version of Holy Scripture. Where so much is Biblical, I have had to a certain extent to adopt Biblical language, but I have striven earnestly to avoid those excesses of Archaism which irritate even the most equable nerves. With the help of Cardinal Hugo's "Concordantiæ Sacrorum Bibliorum" (may his name live for ever!)

I have endeavoured to give references to the principal quotations from Holy Writ. Some will assuredly have escaped me, and I shall be grateful to him who points out to me any omissions.

The reader must not forget that it was the Latin Vulgate which was used by the author of the "Sacrum Commercium." To be faithful, therefore, I could not take my quotations straight from the "Authorised Version." I have translated

sometimes after my own fashion, sometimes with the help of the "Douay" version, but when the sense has allowed of it, I have gladly adopted the noble English of King James' Bible.[1]

. . . . .

And now, *lector humanissime*,

[1] My references to the Psalms are according to the notation of the Vulgate. Perhaps it may be necessary to state for the benefit of readers not well acquainted with the Vulgate, that "Eccli." is a reference to Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach, and not to Ecclesiastes (Eccl.) or the Wisdom of the Preacher.

I am glad to have done with all these dry details, necessary perchance to a right understanding of the subject, and to leave thee free to hasten onward to the green Pastures and still Waters of one of the fairest of Mediæval Idylls. Feed in those fresh Pastures, dip in the restoring Waters: thou canst not but gather therefrom health and strength, life, and the Life to come; together with a right knowledge of the Past, a loving

pity for the Present, and a valorous good resolution for the Future.

VALE !

M. C.

LIVORNO, 13*th June* 1901.

THE LADY POVERTY

"O amor di Povertade
La tua gran nobilitade
Chi potrìa gia mai narrare?"

—*Jacopone da Todi.*

HERE BEGINNETH THE HOLY COMMERCE OF THE BLESSED FRANCIS WITH THE LADY POVERTY:

I

IN PRAISE OF POVERTY[1]

AMONG the cardinal excelling virtues which prepare a place and mansion for God in the Soul of Man, and show a more excellent and

1 Cor. xii. 31.

[1] This chapter is wanting a title in all the Codexes. I have taken the liberty of styling it "In Praise of Poverty."

a speedier way of approaching and attaining unto Him, Holy Poverty shines resplendent in her authority, and excels all others by her peculiar Grace. For she is the Foundation and Guardian of all the Virtues, and holds the Primacy among the Evangelical Counsels. Wherefore let not the other Virtues fear should the rain descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, threatening destruction, if only they have been founded upon the Rock of Poverty. And justly; for the Son of God, the Lord

Matt. vii. 25.

of Hosts and King of Glory, loved this Virtue with a special love, sought this Virtue, found her, and by her wrought Salvation in the midst of the Earth. Her, in the beginning of His preaching, He placed as a Beacon to lighten those entering the Haven of the Faith, and as chief corner-stone of His House. The Kingdom of Heaven which He promised hereafter to all the Virtues, He openeth to Poverty even in this life. For "Blessed," He has said, "are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs *is* the King-

Ps. lxxiii. 12.

Matt. v. 3.

dom of Heaven."[1] They are worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven who have freely renounced all Earthly Things out of Love and Desire for Heavenly Things. He must needs live by Heavenly Things who takes no thought of Earthly Things, and counts them but as dung: even in this our Exile shall he feed on

Phil. iii. 8.

[1] In contradistinction, *e.g.* to the Meek who *shall* possess the Land (Matt. v. 4). Only the persecuted for Justice's sake have the same immediate privilege as the Poor in Spirit (Matt. v. 10). We shall see later on that Persecution is the noblest and most helpful of all the Lady Poverty's sisters.

the honied crumbs which fall from the table of the Holy Angels, that he may taste and see how sweet the Lord is. This is truly to find the Kingdom of Heaven ; 'tis the Pledge of an Eternal Mansion therein, and, as it were, a foretaste of the Blessedness to come.

Ps. xxxiii. 8.

II

HOW THE BLESSED FRANCIS MADE DILIGENT SEARCH FOR THE LADY POVERTY

WHEREFORE the Blessed Francis, as a true Follower and Disciple of the Saviour, gave himself up from the beginning of his Conversion with all his Heart, with all his Strength, and with all his Mind, to seek and to find, to have and to hold the Lady Poverty, dreading no

Adversity, fearing no Evil, sparing no labour, shunning no suffering of the body, so only that he might come unto her to whom the Lord had given the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Like an eager explorer he began to go about the highways and by-ways of the City, diligently seeking her whom his Soul did love. He asked of those who stood about, he questioned those who met him, saying: Saw ye her whom my Soul loveth? But his speech was dark to them as an alien tongue, and, not

Cant. iii. 2.

Cant. iii. 3.

understanding him, they answered: We know not what thou sayest: speak to us in our own tongue, and we will answer thee. For there was not at that time any word or sign in the language, by which the Children of Adam could discourse together of Poverty. They hated her then as they hate her now, nor could they speak with patience to one who sought her. So they answered him that this thing was unknown to them, and that they had no knowledge of what he sought. Then,

said the Blessed Francis, I will go unto the Great and the Wise, and ask them, for they know the Ways of the Lord and the Judgments of God. But these only answered him yet more roughly, saying: What is this new doctrine which thou bringest to our ears? May that Poverty which thou seekest always abide with thee, and with thy children, and with thy seed after thee. As for us, we had rather enjoy the delights of life and abound in riches, for the span of our Life is short and tedious, and

Jer. v. 5.

Acts xvii. 20.

Wisdom ii. 1.

in the end of a man there is no remedy. Therefore we know

Luke xii. 19. nothing better than to eat and drink and be merry while there is still time.

But the Blessed Francis, hearing these things, marvelled in his Heart and gave Thanks

Matt. xi. 25. to God, saying: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God, Who hast hid these things from the Wise and Prudent, and revealed them unto Babes. Even so, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy Sight.

Eccli. xxiii. 1. O God, the Author and Ruler of my being, deliver me not

over to their Counsels, nor suffer me to fall into their iniquity, but give me Thy Grace, so that I may find what I seek, for I am Thy servant, and the Son of Thy Hand-maid.

Ps. cxv. 16.

III

HOW TWO OLD MEN SHOWED THE BLESSED FRANCIS WHERE HE MIGHT FIND THE LADY POVERTY

AND the Blessed Francis, being come out of the City, made haste to reach a certain field, in which, from afar off, he saw two old men sitting, full of a heavy sorrow, the one of whom was saying: To whom shall I look save to some Poor Little Man, con-

Isa. lxvi. 2.

trite of Heart, and who fears my Words? And the other: For we brought nothing into this World, and it is certain we can carry nothing out of it. But having food and a covering to our Bodies, let us be therewith content. 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8.

And when the Blessed Francis had come up with them, he said unto them: Tell me, I beseech you, where the Lady Poverty dwells, where she feeds her flock, where she takes her rest at noon, for I languish for the Love of her. Cant. i. 6. But they answered him, say-

ing: O good Brother, we have
Dan. xii. 7. Apoc. xii. 14. sat here for a Time, and Times, and half a Time, and have often seen her pass this way, and many were they who sought her. Many were they, once upon a time, who walked in her train, but oft she would return alone and desolate, unadorned by jewels or fine raiment, unescorted by any following. And she would
Cant. i. 5. weep bitterly, saying: The Sons of my Mother have fought against me. But we
Cant. i. 3. did answer and say: Have patience, for the Righteous

love thee. And now, O Brother, ascend the great and high Mountain whereon the Lord hath placed her. For she dwelleth in the Holy Mountains, because God hath loved her more than all the tents of Jacob. Giants have failed to follow her footsteps, and the Eagle to fly to the summit of her Hill. Poverty is the one thing despised of all men, for it is not found in the land of them that live in delights. Wherefore she is hid from the eyes of the Living, and the fowls of the air know

Ps. lxxxvi. 1, 2.

Job xxviii. 13.

Job xxviii. 21, 23.

her not. But God understandeth her way; He knoweth her Dwelling-place. If therefore, O Brother, thou wouldst ascend unto her, put off the Garments of thy Pleasures, and lay aside every weight and the Sin which besets thee, for unless thou art free from these trammels, thou canst not attain unto her who is placed at so great a height. But because My Lady is gracious, she is easily seen by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. To meditate upon her, Brother, is

Heb. xii. 1.

perfect Understanding, and whoso watcheth for her shall speedily be secure. Take with thee trusty Companions that thou may'st profit by their Counsel, and be sustained by their Help in the way, for woe to him that is alone; when he falleth he shall have none to raise him up. But do you uphold one another.

Wisdom vi. 16.

Eccl. iv. 10.

IV

OF THE FIRST COMPANIONS OF THE BLESSED FRANCIS

AND when he had heard these Counsels, the Blessed Francis chose unto himself a few faithful Companions, with whom he set out for the Mountain. And he said unto his brothers: Come ye, let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the Lady Poverty, that she may teach us her Ways, and

Isa. ii. 3.

we will walk in her Paths. And when they beheld the Ascent from every side, and saw how exceeding high and steep it was, they began to say one to another: Who shall ascend this Mountain, and who shall reach unto the Mountain's top? The which, when Blessed Francis heard, he said unto them: Strait is the Way, and narrow the Gate, which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it. Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His Might, and all things difficult will become easy unto

Matt. vii. 14.

Eph. vi. 10.

us. Lay down the Burden of your own Will, cast away the heavy Weight of your Sins, and gird yourselves like Strong Men. Forget those things which are behind, and reach forth to those which are before. I say unto you that every place that your foot shall tread upon shall be yours. For as a Spirit before our face is Christ the Lord, drawing us to the Mountain's summit by the Bonds of Charity. Wonderful, O Brethren, are the Espousals of Poverty, but we may hope to enjoy her em-

Phil. iii. 13.

Deut. xi. 24.

braces, for the Mistress of Nations is become as a Widow, the Queen of all Virtues is become contemptible. There is none in all the Land who dares call upon her, none who will stand over against us, none who by right can forbid this Blessed Union. All her Friends have despised her, and are become her Enemies.

Lament. i. 1.

Lament. i. 2.

V

HOW THE BLESSED FRANCIS AND HIS COMPANIONS FOUND THE LADY POVERTY ON THE MOUNTAIN

AND when he had thus spoken, they followed after the Blessed Francis. And as with light feet they hastened to the summit of the Mountain, they beheld my Lady Poverty on the topmost Pinnacle gazing down the Mountain. And when she

saw them climbing thus valiantly, nay, as it were, rather flying towards her, she marvelled exceedingly, and said to herself: Who are these that fly like the Clouds and as Doves to their windows? It is long since I saw such as these, or looked upon men so free from trammels. Therefore will I speak to them of the things which I ponder in my Heart, lest, like the rest, they should repent them of their hardy ascent when they behold the dizzying abyss below. I know they cannot possess me

Isa. lx. 8.

without my consent, but I shall find Favour before my Heavenly Father if I give them the Counsels of Salvation. And behold a Voice spoke unto her, saying: Fear not, Daughter of Sion, for these are of the Seed which the Lord hath blessed. He hath elected them in Charity unfeigned. So from the Throne of her Neediness, the Lady Poverty presented them with Blessings of Sweetness, and said unto them: Tell me the cause of your Advent, my Brothers, and why you hasten

John xii. 15.

2 Cor. vi. 6.

Ps. xx. 4.

thus speedily from the Valley of Tears to the Mountain of Light. Can it indeed be that you seek me who am poor and needy, tossed by the tempest, and bereft of all consolation ?

Isa. liv. 11.

VI

THE BLESSED FRANCIS AND HIS COMPANIONS, EXALTING HER VIRTUES IN DIVERS WAYS, BESEECH THE LADY POVERTY TO ABIDE WITH THEM FOREVER

AND the Blessed Francis and his Companions answered her, saying: Yea, we have indeed come out to seek thee, Lady, and we beseech thee to receive us in Peace. We desire to become

the Servants of the Lord of the Virtues,[1] for He is the King of Glory. We have heard that thou art the Queen of the Virtues, and we have proved it by experience. Wherefore, prostrate at thy Feet, we humbly beseech thee to abide with us, and to light our Way to the King of Glory, as thou wast unto Him the Way, when, a Day-Spring

Ps. xxiii. 10.

Luke i. 78, 79.

[1] Though the Author here quotes Psalm xxiii. 10, "Dominus Virtutum," he is, from the context which follows, obviously not referring to the Lord of Hosts or Sabaoth, nor to the Virtues as one of the Orders of Angels, but to God as the Lord of the Moral Perfections.

from on High, He humbled Himself to visit them that sat in Darkness and the Shadow of Death. For we know that thine is the Power, thine the Kingdom, that thou art constituted Mistress and Queen of the Virtues by the King of Kings Himself. Therefore, we entreat thee, make Peace with us and we shall be saved, and He will receive us through thee, Who through thee did redeem us. Do but elect to save us, and we shall be made free. For the King of Kings and Lord of Lords Himself,

the Creator of Heaven and Earth, desired thy Comeliness and thy Beauty. When the King was at His Rest, rich and glorious in His Kingdom, He left His House, and forsook His inheritance, the Glory and Riches of His House, and His Royal Seat, and sought thee with gracious words. Great therefore is thy Dignity, and there is none so exalted as thee, since He could leave all Angelic Delights and the great Abundance of Celestial Virtues, to seek thee in the nethermost parts of the Earth, in the miry

Ps. xliv. 11.

Cant. i. 11.

Jer. xii. 7.

Ps. cxi. 3.

Ps. xxxix. 3.

Clay, in the Darkness and the Shadow of Death. Thou wast hated by all the Children of Men, and all fled at thy Coming, or strove, as they could, to drive thee from them. And though some could not fly thee altogether, yet not for that reason wert thou less hated and loathed by them.

Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

But then came the Lord, the Lord God, and took thee for Himself, and lifted up thy Head among the Tribes of the people, crowning thee His Bride, and exalting thee above the Highest Heavens. And

although, of a surety, many still hate thee, not knowing thy Virtue and thy Glory, yet hast thou nothing lost thereby, for thou dwellest in Freedom in thy holy Mountains, in the most firm habitation of the Glory of Christ. Thus the Son of the Most High, having become a Lover of thy Beauty, dwelt only with thee in the World, and found thee most faithful in all Things. Even before He left His bright Realms for the Earth, thou hadst prepared Him a fitting place, a Throne on which to

Exod. xv. 17.

Wisdom viii. 2.

sit, a Couch in which to rest, a most poor Virgin from whom He sprung, and shone upon the World. At His Nativity thou didst run to meet Him, so that He might find comfort in thee, and not in soft places. Thou didst lay Him in a Manger, as saith the Evangelist, for there was no room in the Inn. And thus didst thou always inseparably accompany Him, so that during His whole Life, while He dwelt among Men, though the Foxes had Caves, and the Birds of the Air Nests, He had no place to

Luke ii. 7.

Matt. viii. 20.

lay His Head. And when He Who in the Past had opened the lips of the Prophets opened His own Lips to preach, among the many things which He spake, He first praised, first exalted thee, saying: Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. And when He chose Witnesses to His Holy Preaching and to His glorious Work for the Salvation of Man, He did not take rich Merchants, but poor Fisherfolk, that by this choice He might show forth that thou wert to be

Matt. v. 3.

loved by All. And finally that thy Goodness, thy Greatness, thy Power, might be made manifest to All, and how thou art above all the Virtues, and how without thee there is no Virtue, and how thy Kingdom is not of this World but from Heaven, thou alone didst remain with the King of Glory when all His Elect and Beloved had fled from Him in Affright.

John xviii. 36.

Like unto a most dear Mistress and faithful Spouse, thou didst not leave Him for an instant. The more He was

despised by All, the more didst thou cleave to Him. For if thou hadst not been with Him, He could never have been so despised by All. Thou wast with Him when the Jews reviled, the Pharisees scoffed, and the High Priests reproached Him. Thou wast with Him when He was struck, when He was spat upon, when He was scourged. He Who should have been reverenced by All, was derided by all, and thou alone didst minister unto Him. Thou wast with Him unto Death, Phil. ii. 8.

even the Death of the Cross. And on the Cross itself, His Body being stripped, His Arms extended, His Hands and Feet pierced, thou didst suffer with Him, so that nothing did seem more glorious in Him than thou.

When He ascended into Heaven, He left to thee the Seal of the Kingdom of Heaven, that thou might'st seal the Elect, that whosoever should aspire to Eternal Life might come to thee, pray to thee, and enter by thee, for if he be not sealed with thy Seal, no

man may enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, O Lady, have compassion upon us, and seal us with the Seal of thy Grace. For who is there so craven-spirited and foolish as not to love thee with all his Heart, thee who hast been chosen by the Most High, and prepared from all Eternity? Who is there that does not reverence and honour thee, when He Whom all the Heavenly Host adore hath clothed thee with such Honour? Who would not readily adore thy Footsteps, to whom

Antiphon at Compline in the Office of the B.V.M.

the Lord of Majesty so humbly inclined, whom He so intimately embraced, to whom he was joined in so great a Love? We therefore beseech thee, O Lady, by Him and through Him, despise not our petitions in our Necessities, but deliver us at all Times from all Dangers, O Glorious and ever blessed Lady!

VII

THE ANSWER OF MY LADY POVERTY

TO these Words my Lady Poverty, with joyful Heart, and cheerful Mien, and most sweet Voice, made answer, saying: I confess to you, my Brothers and most dear Friends, that from the moment you began to speak, I was filled with Gladness and exceeding great Joy, for I

acknowledge your Fervour, and already know your Holy Intent; your words are dearer to me than Gold and Precious Stones, and sweeter far than Honey and the Honeycomb. For it is not you that speak, but the Holy Ghost that speaketh in you, and it is His Unction that inspires you in all the things which you have spoken concerning the Most High King, Who by His Grace alone chose me as His Beloved, taking away my Reproach among Men, and glorifying me among the

Ps. xviii. 11.

Mark xiii. 11.

1 John ii. 27.

Luke i. 25.

Highest in Heaven. Therefore I desire, if it will not weary you, to tell you the story of my Estate. It is a long Story, but not less useful, and will teach you how to walk with God and please Him, giving heed that you who wish to put your hands to the plough in no wise look back.

Gen. v. 22.

Luke ix. 62.

I am not new,[1] as many think, but old and full of

[1] "Non sum rudis," I am not raw or new, says the Writer, quoting Matt. ix. 16: "Nemo autem immittit commissuram panni rudis in vestimentum vetus": No man putteth a piece of new or raw cloth into an old garment.

years, knowing the nature of Things, the Varieties of Creatures, the mutability of Time. I know the vacillations of the Heart of Man, in part by the experience of Ages, in part by subtlety of Nature, in part by the Merit of Grace. In the beginning I dwelt in the Paradise of God, where Man was naked. Or rather, I was in Man, and of his Essence when he was naked, walking with him in that spacious Paradise, fearing nothing, doubting nothing, thinking no Evil. I thought to have

stayed with him forever, for he had been created by the Most High, just, good, and wise, and placed in a most beautiful and delectable Place. I was joyful exceeding, entertaining him at all Times, for possessing Nothing, he belonged wholly to God. But, woe is me, he succumbed to Evil, which had been unknown from the beginning of the Creation, and the unhappy Spirit of Evil, who, through Vainglory, had lost Wisdom, entered the body of a Serpent because he could not inhabit

Heaven, and treacherously assailed Man, that like himself he might become a transgressor of the Divine Law. Unhappy Man, giving ear unto his evil Counsellor, acquiesced and consented, and having forgotten God, his Creator, followed the Example of the first Transgressor. In the beginning, says Holy Writ,

Gen. ii. 25.

Man was naked but not ashamed, for he was perfect in innocence. But having sinned, he knew that he was naked, and being ashamed, he hastily made

himself an apron of the leaves of the fig-tree.[1]

When, therefore, I saw that my Companion had sinned, and was dressed in leaves (for he had nothing else), I left him. And standing afar off, I beheld him through my Tears, and waited for Him Who should save me from Faintness of Spirit in so great a Storm. And suddenly there came a Sound from Heaven that shook the whole of Para-

Ps. liv. 9.

Acts ii. 2.

[1] So that Man's first transgression after his original Sin, was, by this, his first acquisition of property, a Sin against the High Doctrine of the Lady Poverty.

dise, and a most bright Light shone from Heaven. And I
Gen. iii. 8. looked and beheld the Lord of Majesty walking in Paradise in the cool of the day, resplendent in ineffable Glory. A mighty Host of Angels was in His Train, crying with a loud
Isa. vi. 3. Voice: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, the Earth is full of the Majesty
Dan. vii. 10. of Thy Glory. Thousands of Thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand[1] stood

[1] King James' Bible has "ten thousand times ten thousand."

before Him. Then in Fear and Trembling, overcome with Dread and Amazement, my Body chill, my Heart fast beating, I cried out of the Depths: Mercy, Lord—have Mercy! Enter not into Judgment with Thy Servant, for in Thy Sight shall no Man living be justified. But He said unto me: Go, hide thyself for a while, until Mine Anger be overpast. And straightway He called my Companion, saying: Adam, where art thou? Who answered: I heard Thy Voice, and was afraid, because I was

Ps. cxxix. 1.

Ps. cxlii. 2.

Isa. xxvi. 20.

Gen. iii. 9, 10.

naked, and I hid myself.

Luke x. 30. Naked indeed! The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among Thieves was stripped of this World's Goods, but Adam had been robbed of the Likeness of God. But that King Who is Most High and yet most Gracious, awaited his Repentance, and gave him the Opportunity of returning to Him. Yet in his

Ps. cxl. 4. wretchedness he inclined his Heart to evil Words, and to making excuses for Sin. And thus he increased his guilt, and

Rom. ii. 5. heaped up punishment, treasur-

ing up unto himself Wrath against the day of Wrath and Revelation of the just Judgment of God. For he spared not himself nor his seed after him, delivering up All to the terrible Curse of Death.

And all the Angels that were present condemned him, and the Lord cast him forth from Paradise by a just but not less merciful Judgment, and bade him return to the Earth from whence he was taken, greatly tempering the Curse He had laid upon him. And being stripped of his robe

Gen. iii. 23.

of Innocence, God made him garments of skins, therein signifying that Death had come into the World. And when I saw my Companion clothed with the skins of dead beasts, I left him altogether, for he had been cast forth to multiply his labours, whereby he might become rich. I went forth a fugitive and wanderer upon the Earth, weeping and mourning exceedingly, and I found not where to rest the sole of my Foot. When Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other Patriarchs, received in promise Riches and

Gen. iv. 12.

Gen. viii. 9.

a Land flowing with Milk and Honey, I sought Rest among them, but found none. A Cherub with a Flaming Sword stood before the Gates of Paradise until the Most High came down from the Bosom of the Father, Who sought me out most graciously. And when He had fulfilled all those Things of which you have spoken, and desired to return to the Father Who had sent Him, He made me a Testament to His Elect, and confirmed it by irrefragable Decrees: Lay not up Gold nor

Eccli. xxiv. 11.

Gen. iii. 24.

Matt. x. 9.

Silver, nor Money. Carry
Matt. x. 10 and Luke x. 4. neither Purse, nor Scrip, nor Bread, nor a Staff, nor Shoes,
Matt. v. 40. nor two Coats. And if any Man will contend with thee and take away thy Coat, let
Matt. v. 41. go thy Cloak also. And whoever shall compel thee to go a
Matt. vi. 19. Mile, go with him other twain. Lay not up unto yourselves Treasures upon Earth, where Rust and Moth doth corrupt, and where Thieves break
Matt. vi. 31. through and steal. Take no thought, saying: What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be

clothed? And take no Thought of the Morrow, for the Morrow will take Thought for itself. Sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof. Whosoever doth not renounce all that he hath, cannot be my disciple . . . And many the like sayings, which are all to be found in the Gospels.

Matt. vi. 34.

Luke xiv. 33.

VIII

OF THE APOSTLES

ALL which Things the Apostles and all the Disciples most diligently observed, nor did they ever fail to fulfil the Things they had heard from the Master. They bore themselves as most valiant Knights and Judges of the Earth, carrying the Message of Salvation everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with

Mark xvi. 20.

Signs that followed. They glowed in Charity, abounded in Piety, and endured every Want, taking care that it should not be said of them: These men preach but do not practise. Hence one of them speaketh boldly, saying: For I will not dare to speak of any of those Things which Christ hath not wrought by me by Word and Deed, and by the Power of the Holy Ghost. And yet another speaketh thus: Silver and Gold have I none. Thus did they, one and all, in Life and in Death,

Rom. xv. 18, 19.

Acts iii. 6.

exalt me by the highest Praises. And those who heard these Masters, gave heed to their Preaching, selling all their goods and substance, and dividing them according as every man had need. And they were all together and had all things in common, praising God and having favour with all the People.

Acts ii. 45.

Acts ii. 44.

Acts ii. 47.

IX

OF THE SUCCESSORS OF THE APOSTLES

WHEREFORE the Lord increased daily such as should be saved. Indeed for long the Truth of their Words remained among many, more especially while the Blood of the Crucified Poor One, Jesus Christ, was warm in their memory, and the Noble Chalice of His Passion inebriated their Hearts.

Acts ii. 47.

For if any of them sought to leave me at any time because of my too great Rigours, they would remember the Wounds of the Lord by which He made manifest His loving Compassion, and bitterly repent of the Temptation, clinging to me more closely, and embracing me more eagerly than ever. And I abode in them all, ever striving to impress upon their Memory the Dolours of the Passion of the Eternal King. So strengthened by my Words, they cheerfully encountered the

cruel Sword which shed their holy Blood. And this Triumph continued and endured a long while, so that daily a thousand thousand were sealed with the Seal of the Most High King.

X

THAT TIMES OF PEACE ARE UNPROPITIOUS TO POVERTY

BUT alas! after a while Peace was made, a Peace more hurtful than any War. In the beginning of that long Peace but few were sealed, in the middle of it yet fewer, at the end fewer still. And behold! of a surety in this Peace is my Bitterness

Isa. xxxviii. 17.

most bitter; for All fly from me or drive me from them; by none am I sought, by All forsaken. This Peace was the work of Enemies, not of Friends; of Strangers, not of my Sons. I indeed nourished and raised up Sons, but they contemned me. In that Time when the Lamp of the Lord shone upon my Head, and I walked by His Light through the Darkness, Satan was raging in many who were with me, the World was enticing them, and the Concupiscence of the Flesh, so that many of

Isa. i. 2.

Job xxix. 3.

1 John ii. 15.

them ended by loving the World and the Things of the World.

XI

OF PERSECUTION

BUT the Crown of all the Virtues, and that is the Lady Persecution, to whom the Lord, equally with me, delivered the Kingdom of Heaven, was by my side, and in all things a faithful Helper, a strong Champion, and a prudent Counsellor. She, when she saw any grow lukewarm in Heavenly Charity, or forgetting it a while, or fixing their

Hearts on Earthly Things, she straightway sounded the Trump and moved her Armies, and made their faces to be ashamed, that they might seek the Name of the Lord. But now my Sister has left me, the Light of my Eyes is not with me, for while my Sons are at rest from the Persecutors, they are most cruelly torn by civil and intestine War, envying each other, and struggling for the acquisition of Wealth and an abundance of luxuries.

Ps. lxxxii. 17.

After a while some began

to breathe again, and wished of their own accord to walk in the right Road, which once they had walked in of necessity. All these came to me with prayers and tears, and entreated me to make a perpetual League of Peace with them, and to abide with them as I formerly did in the days of my Youth, when the Lord was with me, and my Children were round about me. These were men of virtue, peaceful men, without Rebuke before the Lord, constant in brotherly Love, so long as they re-

Job xxix. 4.

mained in the Flesh, poor in Spirit, poor in this World's Goods, rich in Holiness, abounding in the Gifts of Heavenly Grace, fervent in Spirit, rejoicing in Hope, patient in Tribulation, meek and humble of Heart, and keeping Peace in their Souls, Harmony in their Ways, Steadfastness in their Hearts, and a joyful Unity in their Walk through Life. These men were indeed devoted to God, pleasing to the Angels, beloved of Men, unsparing to themselves, merciful to Others,

devout in Deed, modest in Demeanour, cheerful of Countenance, earnest of Heart, humble in Prosperity, high-minded in Adversity, temperate of Life, sober in Dress, sparing of Sleep, modest and devout, shining before all Men in the Light of their Good Works. My Soul was joined unto these my Sons, and there was one Faith and one Spirit within us.[1]

[1] There is in a part of this Chapter so intricate an interweaving of Pauline phrases, that I make no attempt to indicate them by references.

XII

OF THE FOLLOWERS OF A SPURIOUS POVERTY

1 John ii. 19.

FINALLY there rose up among us Men who were not of us, certain Sons of Belial speaking Vain Things, working Iniquity, calling themselves Poor Men when they were not Poor, despising and dishonouring me who had been loved with Whole-heartedness by those glorious Men of whom I have spoken, following

the Way of Balaam, the Son of Bosor, who loved the Wages of Sin, Men of a corrupt Mind, devoid of Truth, supposing Gain to be Godliness, Men who in assuming the Habit of Holy Religion, did not put on the New Man, but sought to hide the Old. They derided their Elders, and in secret scoffed at the Life and Character of those who had begun the Way of Holy Conversation, saying that they were imprudent, merciless, and cruel, and that I, whom these holy ones had taken into their

2 Pet. ii. 15.

1 Tim. vi. 5.

Company, was idle, empty, base, rude, lifeless, and feeble. 'Twas my great Rival who zealously worked all this, hiding under a Sheep's Clothing the Cunning of a Fox and the Fierceness of a Wolf.

XIII

OF AVARICE

AVARICE was this Rival's name, and she is the Immoderate Desire of acquiring and holding Riches. But they called her by a holier Name, so that it might not seem that they had abandoned me, by whose Gift they had been raised from the Dust and lifted up out of the Mire. So they spake gently of her to me, but there was Craft and

Anger in their Hearts. And though the Desolation of a City which is set upon a Hill cannot be hid, yet they gave her the Name of Discretion or Foresight, though such Discretion were better named Confusion, and such Foresight a pernicious Forgetfulness of all Good Works. And they said unto me: Thine is the Power; thine the Kingdom: fear not. It is good to use Charity and labour for Good Ends, to succour the Needy and give to the Poor. But I answered: What you say is just, Brothers,

Matt. v. 14.

but I beseech you, consider your Calling. Do not look back. Do not come down from the house-top to take anything out of your Houses, neither return back from the fields to take your Clothes. Do not be busied about this World's Affairs, nor be entangled again in its Pollution, which you have escaped through the Knowledge of the Saviour. For those who are entangled therein a second time must needs be overcome, and the latter End is worse with them than the Beginning, if by a

1 Cor. i. 26.

Matt. xxiv. 17.

2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

Pretence of Piety they turn from the Holy Commandment which has been delivered unto them. And after I had thus spoken, there arose a Dissension among them, for some said that I was good and spoke the Truth, but others that I desired to seduce them into following me, in that I was wretched, and wished to make them wretched with me.

XIV

HOW THE LADY POVERTY SPOKE OF GOOD RELIGIOUS

MY Rival could not yet drive me out of their Land, for there were still many Men among them in all the great Zeal and Charity of their First Fervour, who assailed Heaven by their Cries, and penetrated to the Throne of God by their Perseverance in Prayer, rapt in Contemplation and despising all Things which

Eccli. xxiv. 12.

were of the Earth. Then the Creator of All Things commanded me, and He Who created me said: Let thy Dwelling be in Jacob, and thine inheritance in Israel, and take thou Root in My Elect. All which Things I most diligently obeyed. And while I abode with them, and we walked together on the Royal Road, they became, on my account, of good Repute among the People, and admirable in the Sight of the Mighty. They were honoured by all Men, and reputed as

Wisdom viii. 10, 11.

Saints, though they could not endure to be thus called, remembering what the Son of God had said: I seek no Glory from Man; therefore they refused all Honour offered them by Men.

John viii. 50.

XV

HOW AVARICE TOOK THE NAME OF DISCRETION

BUT whilst my Disciples were thus walking in so great Fervour of the Love of Christ, Avarice, taking to herself the Name of Discretion, spake and said unto them: Do not show yourselves so severe to Mankind, nor thus contemn their Honours, but have a kindly Countenance for them, and do not outwardly

reject the Honours offered to you: be content to do so inwardly. It is a good thing to have the Friendship of Kings, the Acquaintance of Princes, the Intimacy of the Great, for if they honour and venerate you, if they rise up to meet you, many seeing this shall follow their Example, and be the more easily turned to God. And my Friends, acknowledging these advantages, but not guarding themselves from the Snare which had been set in the Way, in the End embraced Honours

Ps. cxlii. 4.

and Glory with all their Heart. They thought themselves to be inwardly such as they seemed outwardly, but they gloried in the Praises they received, and were like the Foolish Virgins without Oil, profitless servants upon the Earth. And Men who believed them to be interiorly that which they seemed exteriorly, freely offered them their Goods in Remission of their Sins. In the beginning they had counted all these Things as dung, saying: We are Poor Men and always de-

Phil. iii. 8.

sire to be Poor; we do not desire your goods but you. We have Food and wherewithal to cover ourselves and desire no more, for Vanity of Vanities and All is Vanity. Wherefore the devotion of Men towards them increased still more, so that many held in small Regard the Goods which they saw thus despised of the Saints.

1 Tim. vi. 8.

Eccl. i. 2.

XVI

HOW AVARICE TOOK THE NAME OF PRUDENCE

THAT cruel Enemy of mine, Avarice, seeing this, began to grow exceeding angry, and to gnash her teeth, and in vexation of Spirit said to herself: What shall I do? For all the World is going after her! I will take, said she, the Name of Prudence, and will speak in their Hearts, and perchance they shall hear

John xii. 19.

and consent. And she did as she had said, speaking unto them humble words, and saying: What do you here all the Day idle and making no Provision for the Morrow? In what could it hurt you to have the necessaries of Life, so long as you lack all Superfluities? For in Peace and Quietness could you work out your Salvation and the Salvation of Mankind, if you were supplied with all Things Needful to you. Therefore, while you have Time, provide for yourselves and those who shall

Matt, xx. 6.

come after you, for Men may not always be so generous to you, nor give you the customary Gifts. It would be good for you to be always as you are, but that is impossible, for God causes you daily to increase and multiply. Would God reject you because you had Wherewith to give to the Needy, and could remember the Poor, when He Himself has said: It is more blessed to give than to receive? Why, therefore, do you not receive the Goods which are offered you, and not defraud the

Acts xx. 35.

Givers of their Eternal Reward? You need fear no harm from the possession of Riches, so long as you account them as Nought. There is no Evil in Things themselves, but only in the Soul of Man, for God saw All Things and they were good. To the Good, all Things are good, all Things serviceable, for them All Things were made. O how many having possessions use them evilly, which had they been yours, would have been put to a good use, for holy is your Purpose, holy your De-

Gen. i. 31.

sire. You do not wish to enrich your Relations who are already rich enough, but simply to have All Things necessary, so that your Conversation may be the more honest and orderly. These, and similar things, she said unto them, and some having already a corrupt Conscience, gave a ready Assent. But others turned a deaf ear to her Sayings, and by shrewd Answers refuted her Reasoning, alleging, as did also their opponents, Arguments from Holy Writ.

XVII

HOW AVARICE CALLED IN THE AID OF SLOTH

BUT Avarice, seeing that she could not, unaided, attain her ends upon my Disciples, changed her plan, that she might better fulfil her Purpose. So she called in Sloth, who neglects to begin good Works, or to finish those begun. And Avarice made a Treaty with Sloth, and en-

tered into a Compact with her against the Religious. They were not intimate, these two, nor closely affined, but they readily made Common Cause in Evil-doing, as formerly did Pilate with Herod against the Messiah. And when their Plan was laid, Sloth began her Ravages, and having given Assault with her Satellites, she entered the Domain of the Religious, and by sheer Force carried off their Arms and extinguished their Charity, reducing them to Tepidity and Sluggishness. And so, a little

also by Pusillanimity of Spirit, they became altogether dead of Heart.

XVIII

OF THE RELIGIOUS WHO WERE CONQUERED BY SLOTH [1]

AFTER a While some of the Religious began to sigh most lamentably for the

[1] In this terrible picture of Religious life at its lowest ebb, some allowance must be made for the fervid imagination and righteous wrath of the holy writer ("*quidam sanctus doctor hujus sanctae Paupertatis professor et zelator strenuus*"). But even with sloth, gluttony, intemperance, greed of gain, hypocrisy, and ungodliness running riot in a whole Community, it is profitable to the historian to note that there is not a hint of unchastity, the truth being that a Community wholly

Flesh-pots of Egypt which they had left behind, and ignobly to seek what with noble Heart they had abandoned. They fretted at having to walk in the Ways of God's Commandments, and followed His Injunctions with a barren Heart. They grew

unchaste is one of those rarities of history sought in the past, and desired, I fear, by certain historians, but scarcely existing outside the cruel inventions of interested despoilers. And lest any be amazed that the Religious life should ever have fallen even half as low as is here portrayed, let them remember that the higher the ideal, the further the fall when it comes, and that the Lady Poverty has ever punished her betrayers by the completest degradation.

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faint under their Burden, and for Want of the Spirit could scarcely breathe. Compunction they rarely felt, and never Contrition; at Obedience they murmured; their Thoughts were Earthy, their Joy carnal, paltry their Sorrow and their Speech imprudent, their Laughter easily provoked. Mirthful of Visage, their Carriage full of Vanity, their Garments soft and delicate, carefully cut, and still more carefully fashioned, they slept inordinately, ate overmuch, and drank intemperately. Their

talk was full of Jests, and Railleries, and Idle Words. They engaged in Story-telling, changed the Rule, disposed of Patronage, and were busily occupied about the Affairs of the World. Of Spiritual Exercises there was no Care or Thought; but rarely Exhortations to save the Soul; they had become lukewarm in Celestial Things. In the Hardness of their Hearts they began to envy one another, to provoke one another, to domineer over one another, one Brother eagerly bringing the

vilest Accusations against another. They shunned Gravity, and sought false Sources of Joy, seeing that they could not have the true. Nevertheless they kept up some show of Sanctity, so that they might not be utterly despised, and by holy Talk they sought to hide their wretched way of Life from the Simple. But so great was the Ruin of the Interior Man, that, unable to contain themselves, their evil Life burst forth in exterior Manifestations. In short they began to fawn upon the

World, striking bargains with Worldlings that they might empty their Purses, and they enlarged their Buildings and multiplied those Things which they had forever renounced. They bartered their Words to the Rich, and their Courtesies to Noble Ladies. They eagerly frequented the Courts of Kings and Princes, that they might join House to House and lay field to field. And now they have become great and rich, and have waxed strong, because they have proceeded from Evil to Evil

Isa. v. 8.

Jer. v. 27.

Jer. ix. 3.

Ps. lxxii. 18.

and have not known God. They were cast down when they were lifted up; they fell to the Earth before their Birth, and yet they say unto me: We are thy Friends.

XIX

HOW THE LADY POVERTY SORROWED OVER CERTAIN RELIGIOUS WHO WERE POOR IN THE WORLD, AND YET MORE PRONE THAN OTHERS TO SELF-INDULGENCE IN RELIGION

IN my Sorrow I sorrowed all the more over certain Religious who had been poor and contemptible in the World, and yet grew rich after they had come to me. And when

Deut. xxxii. 15.

they had waxed fat and gross beyond the rest, they spurned and derided me. They in the World were thought unworthy of Life, being destitute through Need and Hunger. Once

Job. xxx. 4.
Job xxx. 31.

they ate Grass and the Bark of trees, they were disfigured by their Calamity and Misery, and now they are not content with the Community Life, but separate themselves without shame, eating of special Meats. Their Example in this is hurtful to the rest, and, moreover, they aspire to Honour among the Disciples of Christ, who in

this World were held most worthy of Contempt. They who often wanted for Barley-bread and Water, and were glad to lie under the Hedges, were the Sons of the Ignorant and Mean and Unknown, on a level with my own Wretchedness. Now they hate me and fly far from me, and are not ashamed to spit in my face. I have suffered Contumely and Terrors at their Hands, and those who were my Friends and stood by my side have insulted me. They grew ashamed of me, and cast me

Jer. xx. 10.

off all the more that they knew they had been enriched by my Favours, so much so that they even scorned to hear my Name.

Jer. iii. 22. In my Sorrow I sorrowed and said unto them: Return, ye rebellious Children, and I will heal your Backslidings.

Luke xii. 15, and Ephes. v. 5. Take heed and beware of Avarice, which is the Service of Idols, for the Avaricious

Eccl. v. 9. Man shall not be satisfied with Silver. Call to Mind your

Heb. x. 32. former Days in which, being illuminated, you endured a great Fight of Afflictions.

Do not be of them who draw back unto Perdition, but of them that believe to the Saving of the Soul. He who made void the Law of Moses died without Mercy under two or three Witnesses. How much more, think you, doth he deserve sorer Punishment, who hath trodden under Foot the Son of God, and hath accounted the Blood of the Covenant, by which he was sanctified, an unclean thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of Grace? Return, then, ye Transgressors, search your Hearts, for a

Heb. x. 39.

Heb. x. 28.

Heb. x. 29.

Isa. xlvi. 8.

Luke xii. 15. Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of Things which he possesseth.

But they were angered, and said: Go to, depart from us, thou miserable thing. We desire not the knowledge of thy Ways. And I answered and said unto them: Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, at least, O ye, my Friends. Why do you persecute me without a Cause? Did I not tell you that your Ways and mine would not agree? It repenteth me that I have ever seen you.

Job xix. 21, 22.

And the Word of the Lord came to me, saying: Return, return, O Shulamite, return, return, that we may look upon thee. These are the Children of Wrath; they will not hear thee, because they will not hear Me. Their Hearts have become stubborn and unbelieving; they have departed and gone away, but they have not rejected thee without rejecting Me. For thou hast taught them against thee, and instructed them against thine own Head, for if they had never received thee, they would

Cant. vi. 12.

Jer. xiii. 21.

never have been made rich. They pretended to love thee, so that having received thy Benefits, they might depart from thee. Wherefore under adverse Temptation they have turned away, and having laid hold on Lying, they would not return. Do not again believe those that speak thee fair, for they despise thee and seek thy Life. Do not offer Prayers or Hymns for them, for I will not hear thee: I have cast them off because they have despised Me.

Jer. viii. 5.

XX

HOW THE LADY POVERTY SHOWED THE BLESSED FRANCIS THE PERFECT WALK IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

LO! then, dear Brothers, I have told you a long story, so that your eyes may behold where you go, and that you may see what you should do. It is perilous to look back and attempt to deceive God. Remember Lot's wife, and do not believe

Prov. iv. 25.

Luke xvii. 32, and 1 John iv. 1.

every Spirit. But I have confidence in you, dearest Brothers, for I see better Things in you than in any others, and you are nearer to Salvation. You seem to have abandoned Everything, and to have freed yourselves from all Burdens. And the best proof is this, that you have ascended this Mountain, which it is given to so few to do. But I tell you, dear Friends, that the Wickedness of many others hath made me suspicious of the Virtues of the Good, for I have too oft had

experience of ravening Wolves in Sheeps' Clothing.

I desire that each one of you should become a Follower of the Saints, who by Faith and Patience have come into my Inheritance. But because I dread lest the Fate of others should overtake you, I give you this salutary Counsel: that you should not in the Beginning aim at the Higher and more Hidden Things, but that, setting Christ before you, you should little by little come to the Highest. Take heed lest, when the dung of

Heb. vi. 12.

Poverty has been laid about your Roots, you should after all be found barren, for then there will remain nothing but the Axe. Do not trust entirely to the Love which you now have, for Man is more prone to Evil than to Good, and the Soul easily returns to former Habits, even though it may long have been separated from them. I know that with your great Fervour all Things seem easy to you. But remember what is written: Behold they that serve Him are not steadfast, and in His

Job iv. 18.

Angels He found Wickedness. At first it will seem sweet to you to bear Anything, but after awhile, lulled in Security, you will become careless of the Blessings you have received. You will imagine that you can return to Him whenever you wish, and find the old consolation. But the Spirit of Negligence, once admitted, is not so easily got rid of. Your Heart will turn after other Things, but Reason will call you to return to the Former Things. Lapsed into Sloth and Idleness, Words of Excuse

will rise easily to your Lips: We cannot be strong as we were in the Beginning, and now the Times are changed; not knowing that it is written: When a Man hath come to his End then would he make a Beginning. For a voice will always dwell in your Hearts, saying: To-morrow, and To-morrow, we will return to the former Man, for it was better with us then than it is now. Behold, I have foretold you many Things, my Brothers, and many other things have I to say unto you, which ye

Eccli. xvii. 6.

John xvi. 12.

cannot bear now. But the Hour cometh when I shall speak to you plainly of All Things. John xvi. 25.

XXI

HOW THE BLESSED FRANCIS MADE ANSWER TO THE LADY POVERTY

AND when my Lady had made an end of speaking, the Blessed Francis, with his Companions, fell upon his Face, giving Thanks to God, and said: Thy Sayings, O Lady, are well-pleasing unto us, nor in ought that thou hast said can we find any Fault. All that we have

3 Kings x. 6.

heard in our Land concerning thy Words and thy Wisdom, is most true; nay, far greater is thy Wisdom than the Fame thereof. Blessed are thy Servants and Disciples, who dwell forever with thee and hear thy Words of Wisdom. May the Lord thy God, to Whom thou wast pleasing from all Eternity, be forever blessed, Who loved thee and made thee Queen, that thou mightest execute Judgment and Mercy on thy Servants. O how good and how sweet is thy Spirit, chastising the Err-

Wisdom xii. 1.

ing, and admonishing Sinners. Behold, O Lady, by the Love wherewith the Eternal King did love thee, by the Love wherewith thou didst love Him, we beseech thee do not despise our petition, but deal with us according to thy Mercy and Loving-kindness. Great are thy Works, and beyond the Tongue of man to tell, wherefore undisciplined Souls fly from thee, for thou walkest alone in rocky Places, terrible as an Army set in Array,[1] and

Wisdom xvii. 1.

Cant. vi. 3.

[1] "Terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata." This occurs in the Chapter at Prime in the Office of Our Lady, and

Fools cannot dwell with thee. But we are thy servants and the Sheep of thy Pasture Forever, and Forever and Ever, have we sworn and determined to keep the Judgments of thy Justice.

Ps. xcix. 2.

Ps. cxviii. 106.

hence it is here used in connection with that other Lady, Madonna Povertà. The translator of the "Meditazione," finding it would have no associations in Italian (as of course it has none in English), quietly drops it, but I cannot take so great a liberty, nor allow myself to hide the vivid and touching imagination which the pious author thus betrays. Throughout the whole allegory the influence of the Liturgy is conspicuous.

XXII

HOW THE LADY POVERTY GAVE HER CONSENT

Collect from the Litany of the Saints.

AT these Words my Lady Poverty was deeply moved, and as her Property is to have Mercy and spare, she could restrain herself no longer, but having speedily embraced them, and given to each the Kiss of Peace, she said: Behold, my Brothers and my Sons, I will come with you, because I know that through you I shall win many more.

XXIII

HOW THE BLESSED FRANCIS THANKED GOD FOR THE CONSENT OF THE LADY POVERTY

BUT the Blessed Francis, beside himself for joy, began to praise Almighty God with a loud Voice, for that He had not abandoned those who trusted in Him, saying: Bless the Lord, all ye His Elect, keep Days of Rejoicing, and give Glory

Tob. xiii. 10.

Ps. cv. 1.

unto Him, for He is Good and His Mercy endureth Forever. And coming down from the Mountain they brought my Lady Poverty to the Place where they dwelt. And it was about the Sixth Hour.

XXIV

OF THE SOJOURN OF MY LADY POVERTY WITH THE BROTHERS

AND when the Brothers had made all Things ready, they urged the Lady Poverty to eat with them. But she said unto them: Show me first your Oratory, the Cloister and Chapter House, the Refectory, Kitchen, Dormitory, and Stables, your fine Seats and polished Tables and

noble Houses. For I see none of these Things, and yet I do see that you are blithe and cheerful, abounding in Joy, filled with Consolation, as if you expected all these Things to be supplied to you at will. But they made answer and said: O Lady and Queen, we thy Servants are weary with the long Journey, and thou in coming with us hast endured not a little. Therefore, if it please thee, let us eat first, and thus refreshed, we will do thy Bidding. And my Lady answered: It pleaseth

me well. But first bring Water that we may wash our Hands, and a Cloth wherewith to dry them. And they brought forth a broken earthenware Vessel—for they had no sound one—full of Water. And having poured the Water on her hands they searched on all sides for a Cloth. But when none could be found, one of the Brethren offered the Habit he wore, that therewith my Lady might wipe her Hands. And giving Thanks she took it, magnifying God with all her Heart Who had

given her such Men as Companions.

And after this they led her to the Place where the Table was made ready. But she looked round about, and seeing Nothing save three or four Crusts of Barley-bread laid upon the Grass, she marvelled exceedingly within herself, saying: Who ever saw the Like in the Generations of Old? Blessed art Thou, O Lord God, Who hast care of All, for Thy Power is at hand when Thou wilt, and Thou hast taught Thy People, that

Wisdom xii. 13, 18, 19.

by such Works they may please Thee. And thus they sat a while giving Thanks to God for all His Gifts. Then my Lady Poverty commanded them to bring in Dishes the Food which they had cooked. But they fetched a Basin full of cold Water, that all might dip their Bread therein, for here was there no abundance of Dishes or superfluity of Cooks. My Lady Poverty then begged that she might at least have some uncooked savoury Herbs, but having neither Garden nor Gardener,

the Brethren gathered some wild Herbs in the Wood, and placed them before her. Who said: Bring me a little Salt, that I may savour these Herbs, for they are bitter. But they answered her: Then must thou tarry a while, Lady, until we go into the City to obtain it, if haply there should be any one who would give us some. Then she asked them, saying: Fetch hither a Knife that I may trim these Herbs, and cut the Bread, which verily is hard and dry. Who answered: O Lady, we have no Smith to

make us knives. For the present, use thy Teeth in the place of a Knife, and afterwards we will provide. Whereupon she said: Have you a little Wine? To which they answered: No, Lady, we have no Wine, for the necessaries of Man's Life are Bread and Water, and it is not good for thee to drink Wine, for the Spouse of Christ should shun Wine as Poison. Eccli. xxix. 28.

And when they were satisfied, rejoicing more in the Nobility of Want than if they had had an Abundance of All

Things, they blessed the Lord, in Whose Sight they had found such Favour, and led my Lady Poverty to a Place where she might sleep, for she was weary. And she lay down upon the bare ground. And when she asked for a Pillow, they straightway brought her a Stone, and laid it under her Head. So after she had slept for a brief space in Peace, she arose and asked the Brothers to show her their Cloister. And they, leading her to the Summit of a Hill, showed her the wide World, saying: This

is our Cloister, O Lady Poverty. Thereupon she bade them all sit down together, and opening her Mouth she began to speak unto them Words of Life, saying:

XXV

HOW MY LADY POVERTY BLESSED THE BROTHERS, EXHORTING THEM TO PERSEVERE IN THE GRACE WHICH THEY HAD RECEIVED

BLESSED are you, my Sons, of the Lord who made Heaven and Earth, who have received me into your House with such Fulness of Charity that it seems to me as if, being with you, I had to-day

been in Paradise. Wherefore I am full of Joy and abound in Consolation, and I ask pardon of you for having so long delayed my Coming. Verily the Lord is with you, and I knew it not. Behold, what I longed for I see, what I desired I hold, for I am joined to them that are a type upon Earth of Him to Whom I am espoused in Heaven. The Lord bless your Fortitude, and receive the Work of your Hands. I pray and most earnestly beseech you, as most dear Sons, to persevere

Gen. xxviii. 16.

Antiphon at the Benedictus in the Feast of St Agnes.

Deut. xxxiii. 11.

in those Things which you have begun by the Inspiration of the Holy Ghost, not abandoning your Perfection as is the Custom with some, but avoiding all the Snares of Darkness, strive ever after Things more Perfect. Most high is your Perfection, above Man and the Strength of Man, and it excels in its Brightness the Perfection of your Forefathers. Have no Doubt or Fear concerning the Kingdom of Heaven, for you already hold the Earnest of Future Inheritance and a Pledge of

Eph. i. 14. 2 Cor. v. 5.

the Spirit, being sealed with the Seal of the Glory of Christ, and are like in all things, by His Grace, to that first Company of Disciples which He gathered about Him when He came into the World. For that which they did when He was with them, you have done not seeing Him, and you need not fear to say: Behold we have left all Things and have followed Thee. Matt. xix. 27.

Let not the Greatness of the Fight, nor the Magnitude of the Labour hinder you, for Great shall be your Reward. Heb. x. 35.

Heb. xii. 2. Looking unto the Author and Finisher of All Good Things, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who having Joy set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the Shame, hold fast to the Confession of your Hope, without wavering. Run with Charity to the Fight that is before you; run, too, with Patience which is most necessary to you, that by so doing the Will of God you may receive the Promise. For God is able by His Holy Grace to bring to a happy Consummation, the Work

Heb. x. 23.

which is above your Strength, because He is faithful to His Promises. Let nothing be found in you pleasing to the Spirit of the Children of Unbelief, let there be no Doubt or Hesitation, lest in working their Wickedness against you, they convict you of Consent. For it is a proud Spirit, but its Pride and Arrogancy are greater than its Strength. This Spirit is exceeding wrath with you, and it will turn against you all the Arms of its Cunning. It will seek to pour out the Venom of its

Eph. ii. 2.

Isa. xvi. 6.

Malice upon you, like one who in fighting had thought all his Enemies vanquished, and now rages to see you looking down upon him. All the Inhabitants of Heaven, O dearest Brothers, rejoice exceedingly in your Conversion, and have sung a new Song before the Face of the Eternal King. The Angels rejoice because of you, for through you many shall continue Virgins, they shall be resplendent in Chastity, and shall fill the empty places in the City on High, where Virgins are

established in especial Glory, for those that neither marry nor are given in Marriage are like the Angels in Heaven. The Apostles exult at seeing their Life renewed, and their Doctrine preached, and because you show an Example of the Highest Sanctity. And the Martyrs exult, waiting to see their Constancy in the Shedding of Blood made manifest in you also. The Confessors dance before the Lord, knowing that their Victory in the Face of the Enemy is often to be repeated in you. The

Matt. xxii. 30.

Rev. xiv. 4. Virgins who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, likewise rejoice, knowing that by you many will be daily added to their Number. The Whole Court of Heaven is filled with Joy, for daily shall they keep the Festival of some new Inhabitant, and because they shall be continually incensed with the Odour of Holy Prayers ascending from this Valley of Tears.

Rom. xii. 1. Therefore, I beseech you, dear Brothers, by the Mercy of God, for which you have made yourselves thus Poor,

carry out that which you have come to do, for which you left the Rivers of Babylon. Receive in all Humility the Grace which has been given you, use it worthily in All Things, and always for the Praise, Honour, and Glory of Him Who died for you, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth, Victorious and Glorious, Eternal God, World without End,

AMEN

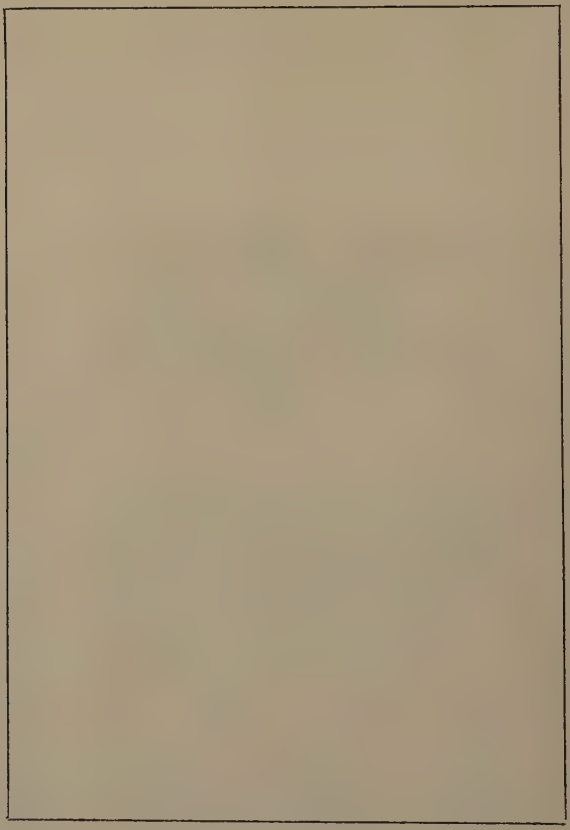
HERE ENDETH THE TREATISE CONCERNING THE LADY POVERTY AND OUR SERAPHIC FATHER, THE BLESSED FRANCIS.

This Work was done in the Month of July, after the Death of the Blessed Francis, in the Year One thousand two hundred and twenty-seven after the Incarnation of OUR LORD and SAVIOUR, JESUS CHRIST.

ON THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EVANGELICAL POVERTY

BY

FATHER CUTHBERT, O.S.F.C.



THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EVANGELICAL POVERTY

"THIS is the sublimity of most high Poverty which has made you, beloved brethren, heirs and kings of the Kingdom of Heaven."[1] Thus wrote St Francis of Assisi when he gave his disciples the Rule which obliged them to "serve the Lord in poverty and humility." It is

[1] Regula S. Francisci, Cap. vi.

easy to recognise in these words the note of exultation and achievement which made St Francis the most inspiring personality in Mediæval Christendom, and which gives to his name, even to-day, a singular power over the imagination of the Christian World. Clad in his peasant's dress, and with no possessions of his own in the world save his soul and body,[1] he is nevertheless the man rich in all things that

[1] "Non habebat aliud Christi pauper nisi duo minuta, corpus scilicet, et animam, quod posset liberali charitate largiri." Leg. Maj. S. Bonav., Cap. ix.

are of vital interest, the clear spiritual vision, the perfect joy, the encompassing sympathy, which gathers all palpitating life into its own. Francis *lived*, if ever a man lived. His was the liberty of soul which finds the joy of life in all Creation.

Artificial stimulus and transient excitement could add nought to the Joy that was his. To him the sky and the earth, the sun and the flowers, the fields and all living things, spoke with articulate speech of the life that is in them.

As for his fellow-men, their life was his life. He had come to pass beyond the bounds of his own personality, and to enter into that spiritual communion with all living things, whereby man escapes from his own limitations, and the world lives in him as he in the world. And above all, and yet in all, he beheld the ever blessed God, the Author of all life that is. To Francis, God was ever present in the Creation, the Life behind all life. "The Heavens show forth the Glory of God, and the Firmament

declareth the Work of His Hands." The intimate relationship binding creation to its Creator was to him an abiding perception; he could not think of Earth apart from Heaven, nor of finite man apart from the Infinite God. Whatever was good and beautiful was to him an indication of the Divine Goodness and Beauty, a portal of the Eternal Kingdom; and with keen spiritual intuition he discovered the good and the beautiful, where men of lesser sensibility would only find the commonplace and the material.

"To them that love God, all things work together unto Good;"[1] the truly spiritual man discovers the imprint of the Divine Life along all the highways and byways of Creation: just as the poet's eye discovers beauty in the woodland through which the ordinary wayfarer passes unheeding.

Thus the whole creation poured into the Soul of Francis an unceasing stream of spiritual life, and with the inflowing life came joy—joy unutterable;

[1] Romans viii. 28.

and sorrow too. For life as it is, has no joy altogether separate from pain. There is tragedy in the purest romance, death even where there is life. And so the "joyous troubadour of God" sorrowed much because of the shadow that lay across the sunshine. To him personally life was joy, such was his liberty of spirit; but it was not so to all men. Many are they to whom life is sorrow; they walk as in a dark valley with but the twilight around them; nay, at times with no light at all, but only darkness,

and their souls are starved for lack of light and warmth ; even when in their ignorance or despair they seek pleasure in the immediate objects of sense around them. For these he sorrowed with the sorrow of Christ weeping over Jerusalem. It was a sorrow which kept him at long vigils when the world lay asleep, praying for mercy for the souls of men. Yet this sorrow could not destroy the essential joy of life which was his in a super-eminent degree. He sorrowed as many a man and woman sorrows over a

friend who is deprived of the happiness which is their own.

Truly was Francis a "King and heir of the Kingdom," if Kingship means sovereign possession; for he found what is best in life and had it as his own, nought else than the very joy of life. Francis himself has told us how this joy of life came to him with the absolute renunciation of what the world at large holds most dear — wealth, place, and power. In renunciation he found spiritual freedom, and with it joy. No man is truly

joyous whose joy does not spring from his own soul, or from that inalienable possession of the world which comes of spiritual communion with what is good and true in it, and therefore Eternal.

The joy which is dependent upon the possession of the merely visible and material can never reach the inmost spirit of man, even were such possession not, at best, uncertain and of its nature transitory. Nay, the joy of life, which springs from man's own spirit, is impossible to him

whose heart is set upon the merely external world. For the spiritual and the material are in the immediate aspect a simple antithesis; so that where the one is, the other cannot be. "You cannot serve God and mammon." You cannot satisfy your nature with the transitory, and yet retain an appetite for the Eternal. Consequently, he who would be free and retain a relish for the life of the Spirit, must beware of the lust of the earth, and keep a detached heart towards what is of its nature unspiritual.

To St Francis, a man amongst men, the lust of the earth was radically allied with pride of class, an inordinate ambitiousness of glory, and a love of luxury. Poverty, as Francis understood it, meant the antithesis of all this. The Lady Poverty (to borrow the Saint's own imagery) was an outcast; she was the despised of men; and she walked amid the rough ways of the earth with threadbare garments and bruised feet.

The story how Francis found his ideal bride and came to

love her with chivalric devotion, is too well known to need repetition. The final act in the drama came when one day, riding in the plain before Assisi, he was met by a leper who besought an alms, and, filled with disgust, he at first thought to pass on, but, moved by a nobler impulse, cast himself from his horse, and not only gave the alms, but folded the leper to his breast and embraced him. From that moment he himself has told us that "what had seemed bitter was changed into sweet-

ness of soul and body, and not long afterwards I left the world."[1]

The embrace of the leper marked the final abandonment in Francis' soul of the sense of separation between himself, the son of the wealthy Bernardone, and the outcasts of society. Henceforth to Francis, the poor and the outcast were human brethren, worthy of a brother's intimate love and care. In the same moment he cast aside, once for all, his youthful dream of entering

[1] Testament of St Francis.

the ranks of chivalry, and seeking renown in battle and tournament. Henceforth he would be the servant of his brothers the poor, and "serve the Lord in Poverty and Humility."

The path of renunciation was further determined for him when his new ideal of life clashed with the commercial interests of his family. In the newly-awakened consciousness of his kinship with the poor, he considered his share in the family business as their share, and freely parted

with what he had a right to consider his own. Pietro Bernardone, his father, foresaw commercial ruin from such a course, and when he found that Francis was indissolubly wedded to his ideal, promptly disinherited him. Henceforth Francis was without house or property of his own. With the keenness of a soul set free, he at once recognised in his father's act of disinheritance the charter of his spiritual freedom. "Now in truth can I say: Our Father Who art in Heaven!" Heaven and

earth became his when in the moment of abandonment he called God his Father. Thus he cast from himself forever the three dominant tyrannies which in his own age and since, have oppressed the souls of men—wealth, place, and power. He had become in very truth the Poor Man of Assisi, and yet who was richer than he?

Never did Francis regret his renunciation, but ever did the thought of it fill him with gratitude and joy. One day, some years after his disinherit-

ance, the Saint and one of his disciples, Brother Masseo, were eating a scanty meal of broken bread, begged by the way; they ate near a fountain, and a large stone was their table. "O Brother Masseo," said Francis, his soul bubbling with joy, "we are not worthy of so great a treasure;" and he repeated these words several times. Brother Masseo answered: "Father, how canst thou talk of a treasure where there is so much poverty and indeed a lack of all things? for we have neither

cloth, nor knife nor dish, nor table, nor house; neither have we servant nor maid to wait upon us." Then said the Saint: "And this is the very reason why I look upon it as a great treasure, because man has no hand in it, but all has been given us by Divine Providence, as we clearly see in this bread of charity, in this beautiful table of stone, and in this clear fountain."[1] Surely here we find the very apotheosis of poverty; of the poverty which,

[1] "Fioretti," chap. xiii.

discarding the artificial, is happy in the simple realities and in the bounties of nature, and feels no barrier between itself and the spiritual possession of the very earth itself.

Here it may be as well to take note how alien is the poverty of Francis from the vulgarity and squalor, the idleness and discontent, which mark too frequently the life of the poor. No greater misconception of Franciscan poverty could there be than to conceive it as sanctioning

or condoning any condition that detracts from the proper native dignity of man. The "Lady Poverty" of Francis went with bare and bruised feet, her garment was coarse, and she ate but the bread of the peasant; but she retained her native dignity of soul, and bore herself as a Queen wherever she went. She delighted in the pure air, and the flowers, and the running stream, was honest and self-revering, simple and joyous.

The poverty of our city

slums where hearts break in discontent, and souls are starved for lack of spiritual intelligence—such was not the poverty of Francis' dream. To use again his own manner of speech, this is poverty in slavery, degraded and dishonoured by the vice and selfishness of man. With a full heart would he have set himself to rescue his Ideal from her modern degradation and restore her to her place of honour upon the earth. Knight-errant as he was, he would not have rested until

poverty was made honourable amongst men. To rescue the poor from the conditions which have so effectually demoralised them during the past two or three centuries of unheeding individualism, would undoubtedly have been to Francis a first and urgent duty were he with us to-day. Even in his own time he regarded with anxiety the conditions which debased the poor; even then he considered himself the knight-errant sent to rescue the comely maiden Poverty from the neglect and heartless

scorn of the world.[1] But was ever Italian peasant so utterly degraded as are many of the victims of modern industrialism? Poverty with Francis was the mother of spiritual freedom; poverty in the London slum is synonymous with hard materialism and irreligion. Was ever contrast greater? And yet Francis has made evident to us that beneath the squalor and degradation of the modern city, there is a spiritual possibility,

[1] *Vide* "The Parable of Poverty," Legenda III. Soc. Cap. xii., Bollandist Edition.

if only it can be recovered. But will it ever be that poverty shall again regain amongst the hungry multitude the honourable estate with which the Saint of Assisi had endowed it? Will it ever be rescued from its present inhuman conditions? The future only can tell; and they who strive that it shall be so can only work in the strength of their faith; but faith verily can accomplish the apparently impossible, if faith itself be strong. Meanwhile the ideal of Francis has assuredly a prophetic message

for the multitude which is not hungry.

Poverty, as Francis preached it, is an integral element in the Christian life. Christianity imperatively demands of all its followers an acceptance of the truth which Francis embodied so wonderfully in himself. No one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless he be as Francis was, a lover of Poverty. Such is the Gospel. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."[1] There are those

[1] Matthew v. 3.

who so interpret this beatitude as to empty it of all significance concerning material possessions. The meaning of Christ, however, is made clear, by His own earthly life and by the lives of His early disciples. "Poverty of Spirit" means nothing less than detachment of heart from the possession or achievement of material gain, and from its attendant pleasures. No man can be a disciple of Christ who is not free from the moral slavery which wealth and temporal possessions so easily set upon

the soul. To no man is given the spiritual insight and vision which alone can bring rest eternal to man's spirit, unless he have first put from him the lust of the earth. And according to the measure of his detachment is spiritual achievement possible.

Is then every man to imitate St Francis of Assisi, and cast off all wealth and become dependent upon the labour of his hands or the charity of his neighbour? No such claim is made by Francis, for it was not made by Christ.

If Christ demanded of the young man that he should "go and sell what he had and give it to the poor" in order to follow Him, He also acquiesced in the rich Zacchæus keeping his wealth so long as he did not neglect his duty to those in need. Francis, too, following the Divine Model, gave no injunction to the Lord of Chiusi or to the Lady Giacoma to renounce their property, and he expressly forbade his friars, who like himself gave up all right of possession, to judge those who

have possessions. No, it is not the holding of property, but the selfish misuse of it and the inordinate desire of material gain and its pleasures, which is opposed to the virtue of evangelical poverty. In few words may the Christian precept of poverty be set forth: Let no man set his heart on any material possession for its own sake, or for the mere holding of it; if a man is lacking in this world's goods, let him not fret nor complain, but seek rather the life of the spirit. If, on the other hand,

he is endowed with this world's goods, either by inheritance or as the result of honest labour, let him bear in mind that such goods are not absolutely his own; they belong, in the first instance, to God, the Master of all, and may rightfully be used and distributed only subject to the Divine laws of justice and charity. No man has an absolute ownership before God, so that he may satisfy his own whim or pleasure without consideration for what is due by Divine Law to his fellow-men. Possession in the

sphere of conscience is stewardship. The rich are God's stewards, appointed to "give to every man his just measure in due season." Such briefly is the precept of Evangelical Poverty—a precept which has no direct connection with any theory of social economics, but is based upon the fundamental law of religion, that only the poor in spirit are spiritually free and capable of citizenship in the realm of eternal life.

Assuredly to us who live our lives upon the pulse of a great industrial empire, this message

of the Poverello comes with a distinctness not to be passed unheeded. As a race we are a prosperous people, and money-making is our first preoccupation. Luxuries are easily within our grasp; cheap luxuries, perhaps, which is all the worse, for that very cheapness is a snare blinding us to the fact that what we indulge in is a luxury. In money-making and luxury lie the elemental dangers to our spiritual life. "Money," says Cardinal Newman, "is a sort of creation, and gives the

acquirer, even more than the possessor, an imagination of his own power, and tends to make him idolise himself. Again, what we have hardly won we are unwilling to part with; so that a man who has himself made his wealth will commonly be penurious, or, at least, will not part with it except in exchange for what will reflect credit on himself or increase his importance. Even when his conduct is most disinterested and amiable (as in spending for the comfort of those who depend on him),

still this indulgence of self, of pride, and worldliness insinuates itself." And he adds: "If such be the effect of the pursuit of gain on an individual, doubtless it will be the same on a nation; and if the peril be so great in the one case, why should it be less in the other?"[1] The enduring strength of a nation, as of an individual, depends upon moral fibre and spiritual vision. If these be destroyed no nation can long remain save as a warn-

[1] "Parochial Sermons": *The Danger of Riches.*

ing to the nations that shall come. Undoubtedly there are strong tendencies amongst us towards the worship of wealth and its attendant luxuries and towards a selfish accumulation of wealth beyond all possible needs, tendencies which acquire strength with the growth of empire and trade. Well for us is it that at this time Francis of Assisi is becoming widely known. To all who revolt against the vulgar materialism which dominates so much of our present life, Francis of Assisi is as a

prophet sent by God. Standing against the dark background of Avarice and Luxury which had already infested the growing commercial centres of the mediæval world, he throws the light of his own clear personality into the dark corners of our own life.

We yearn, many of us, for a deeper spiritual life; we sorrow because the joy of life seems flitting ever further and further away from this complex social organism of ours. We seek direction, and the Poverello is here to lead us;

and the way he leads is that of detachment and renunciation. But his own personality and life are an assurance to us that the renunciation he preaches, leads to richer gain; he leads us through death, only that we may find life even here, in some measure, upon the earth, and in the fulness of the spirit hereafter. Thus and not otherwise does he interpret to us the Poverty of Christ.

FATHER CUTHBERT, O.S.F.C.

CRAWLEY, FEAST OF ST ANTHONY OF PADUA, 1901.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

A PRAYER OF THE BLESSED FRANCIS TO OBTAIN HOLY POVERTY.

O LORD JESUS! Show me the ways of Thy dearly-loved Poverty. I know that the Old Testament was but a Figure of the New. In the Old, Thou hast promised that "every place that your foot shall tread upon, shall be

Deut. xi. 24.

yours." To tread under foot is to despise; Poverty treads all Things under foot, therefore she is the Queen of all Things. But, O my dear Lord Jesus, have pity upon me and upon my Lady Poverty, for I am consumed with Love for her, and can know no rest without her. Thou knowest all this, my Lord, Thou who didst fill me with the Love of her. But she sitteth in sadness, rejected of all; she, the Mistress of Nations, is become as a Widow; the Queen of all Virtues is become contemp-

Lament. i. 1.

tible ; and sitting upon a dung-hill she lamenteth that all her friends have despised her and have become her enemies ; for long now she knows them to be wantons and no Spouses of hers.

Remember, O Lord Jesus, that Poverty is so much the Queen of the Virtues, that Thou, forsaking the dwelling-place of the Angels, didst descend upon Earth in order to espouse her in Love Everlasting, and so as to bring forth in her, and by her, and through her, all the Children of Perfec-

tion. And she clung to Thee with such Fidelity, that even within Thy Mother's womb she paid Thee homage, for Thy Infant Body was, it is thought, the smallest of all. And at Thy Birth she received Thee in a Holy Manger and Stable; and in Thy Life upon Earth she so deprived Thee of all things, that Thou hadst no place where to lay Thy Head. And as a faithful Helpmeet she followed Thee loyally when Thou didst go forth to do battle for our Redemption, and in the Agony of the

Passion she was Thy only Armour-bearer. When Thy Disciples denied Thee and fled, she alone did not leave Thee, but was Thy faithful Companion with all the host of her Princes.

Even Thy own Mother (who alone did faithfully honour Thee, and with grievous Sorrow share Thy Passion), even she, I say, could not by reason of the height of the Cross, reach up unto Thee, but the Lady Poverty in all her Penury, like a most dear Servitor, did there hold Thee

in an ever closer embrace, and join herself more and more nearly to Thy Sufferings. For the which reason she did not wait to smooth Thy Cross, nor to give It even the rudest preparation; nor, it is thought, did she even make sufficient Nails for Thy Wounds, nor sharpen or polish them, but furnished three only, all rough and jagged and blunted, to support Thee in Thy Martyrdom. And when Thou wast dying of a burning Thirst, Thy faithful Spouse was careful lest Thou shouldst have one

drop of Water even, and by the hands of the impious Soldiery, prepared Thee a Cup of such bitterness, that Thou couldst only taste, but not drink of it. And in the close Embrace of this Thy Spouse, Thou didst yield up the Ghost.

But so faithful a Spouse was not absent at Thy Burial and would not suffer Thee to have anything of Thy own, either Sepulchre or Ointments or Linen, for these were all borrowed from others. Nor did she fail to be present at Thy Resurrection; for rising

gloriously in her Embrace, Thou didst leave behind in the Sepulchre all those things which had been borrowed. And then Thou didst take her up into Heaven with Thee, abandoning all earthly things to those that are of the Earth, and bequeathing unto the Lady Poverty the Seal of the Kingdom of Heaven, wherewith she might seal the Elect who desire to walk in the Way of Perfection.

O who would not love the Lady Poverty above all things! Of Thee, O Jesus, I ask to be

signed with this Privilege; I long to be enriched with this Treasure; I beseech Thee, O most poor Jesus, that, for Thy sake, it may be the Mark of me and mine to all Eternity, to possess no thing of our own under the Sun, but to live in penury upon the goods of others, so long as this vile body lasts.

AMEN.

NOTE

THIS remarkable prayer figures as the composition of St Francis in all the editions of his works from Wadding (Antwerp, 1623) to Fra Bernardo da Fivizzano (Florence, 1880). But we have (unfortunately) no satisfactory or scientific proof that the prayer was really the composition of the Seraphic Patriarch. Wadding took it from Ubertino da Casale "Arbor Vitæ Crucifixi Jesu"

(Venice, 1485). Ubertino wrote his redoubtable book in 1305, and though he puts this prayer into the mouth of St Francis, the context points to the fact that he is rather attempting to reproduce the sentiments of the Saint, than giving a prayer literally written by him. And his indebtedness to the "Sacrum Commercium" is obvious. But whether written by St Francis or not, there can be no doubt that when he prayed, he often prayed after this fashion. It most faithfully reflects his spirit and

ideas, and is admirably illustrative of the "Sacrum Commercium." For this reason we have given it a place in the Appendix. It is also interesting as being the probable source whence Dante drew his beautiful idea that the Lady Poverty was more privileged than the Blessed Virgin, insomuch as she followed the Lord up on to the very Cross itself:

"*Si che, dove Maria rimase giuso,*
Ella con Cristo salse[1] *in su la croce.*"

[1] Scartazzini rejects the reading "salse" ("lezione priva di autorità"), and adopts "pianse." I hope, for the

The naïve sublimity of the concluding petition of the prayer "et alienis rebus semper cum usus penuria, dum vivit caro misera, sustentari," is most characteristic of the Saint, not only in its sentiment but in its Franciscan directness. It strikes strangely upon modern ears to hear a Divine petition that certain men may ever be known as men who lived

sake of Dante's great imagination, that he may be in the wrong. So competent an authority as Mr Wicksteed adheres to "salse," basing his reason on this very prayer. See the "Paradise" of Dante Alighieri, translated by Philip H. Wicksteed, Dent, 1899.

upon others. But it is logical, as Francis always was. There can be no evangelical poverty with possessions, and yet man must keep body and soul together; hence mendicancy is the only resource of the real lovers of my Lady Poverty. This sentiment recalls the famous saying of St Francis in the Fifth of his "Collationes Monasticæ": "There is a compact between the World and my Brothers. They owe it a good example, and the World in return must provide them with all necessities. But if the

Brothers, breaking faith, cease to give their good example, the World will, with justice, withdraw its helping hand."

Very interesting, and of considerable importance, is the fact that this Prayer speaks of Christ being crucified with three nails only. Whether St Francis wrote the prayer or not, we may take this to have been his opinion, for it seems to have been the common opinion of the thirteenth century. And bearing in mind this opinion of his, it becomes impossible to attribute the

phenomena of his Stigmata to subjective causes, or to that which is loosely called hysteria. The Stigmata of St Francis were not merely open wounds, but showed nails of a black fleshy substance, one in each hand and one in each foot. If these Stigmata had been the result of intense meditation on the Passion, then, seeing what his opinion was, the singular phenomena which were developed in him, would have shown one nail only for the feet, and not a nail in either foot. The point is of capital

importance to investigators of a remarkable occurrence which, while proved beyond a doubt as a matter of fact, has hitherto found no scientific explanation.

APPENDIX II.

PARADISE—CANTO XI.

LINES 28-123

Dean Plumptre's Translation

IT is probable that Dante knew the "Sacrum Commercium"; it is certain that he knew the Prayer to obtain Poverty. Therefore it may be convenient to give *in extenso* that part of the Divine Canto which sings of the Mystic loves of Francis and the Lady Poverty.

The Providence,—which all things doth dispose
With such deep counsels that all mortal gaze
Is baffled ere to that great depth it goes—
That unto Him she loves might bend her ways,
The Bride of Him Who, with a bitter cry,
Espoused her with the blood we bless and praise,
In fuller peace, more steadfast loyalty,
Her, for her good, with two high chiefs endowed,
That they on either side her guides might be.
The soul of one with love seraphic glowed;
The other by his wisdom on our earth

A splendour of cherubic glory showed.

40 Of one I'll speak; for, if we tell the worth
Of one, 'tis true of both, whiche'er we take,
For to one end each laboured from his birth.

43 Between Tupino and the streams that break
From the hill chosen by Ubaldo blest,
A lofty mount a fertile slope doth make;

46 Perugia's Sun-gate from that lofty crest
Feels heat and cold; Nocer' and Gualdo pine
Behind it, by their heavy yoke opprest.

49 On this slope, where less steeply doth incline

The hill, was born into this world a sun,
Bright as this orb doth oft o'er Ganges shine.
Whence, naming this spot, let not any one
Call it Ascesi—that were tame in sense—
As Orient doth its proper title run.
Such was his rise, nor was he far from thence,
When he began to make the wide earth share
Some comfort from his glorious excellence;
For he, a youth, his father's wrath did dare
For maid, for whom not one of all the crowd,
As she were death, would pleasure's gates unbar.

61 And then before court spiritual he vowed
Et coram patre—marriage-pledge to her,
And day by day more fervent love he showed.

64 Of her first spouse bereaved, a thousand were,
And more, the years she lived, despised, obscure,
And, till he came, none did his suit prefer.

67 Nought it availed that she was found secure
With that Amyclas when the voice was heard
Which made the world great terror-pangs endure;

70 Nought it availed that she nor shrank nor feared,

So that, when Mary tarried yet below,
She on the Cross above with Christ appeared.
But lest I tell it too obscurely so,
By these two lovers, in my speech diffuse,
Thou Poverty and Francis now mayst know.
Their concord and their looks of joy profuse,
The love, the wonder, and the aspect sweet,
Made men in holy meditation muse,
So that the holy Bernard bared his feet,
The first to start, and for such peace so tried,
That slow he thought his pace, though it was fleet.

82 O wealth unknown, true good that doth abide!
Ægidius bared his feet, Sylvester too,
Following the Bridegroom, so they loved the Bride.
85 Then went that Father and that Master true
With that his Bride and that his family,
Who round their loins the lowly girdle drew;
88 Nor was faint heart betrayed in downcast eye,
As being Pietro Bernardone's son,
Nor yet as one despised wondrously;
91 But like a king his stern intention
To Innocent he opened, who did give
The first seal to that new religion.
94 Then, when the race content as poor to live

Grew behind him, whose life, so high renowned,
Would, in Heaven's glory, higher songs receive,
With a new diadem once more was crowned
By Pope Honorius, from on high inspired,
This Archimandrite's purpose, holy found.
And after that, with martyr zeal untired,
He, in the presence of the Soldan proud
Preached Christ, and those whom His example fired;
And finding that that race no ripeness showed
For their conversion, not to toil in vain,

He to Italia's fields his labours vowed.
On the rough rock 'twixt Tiber's, Arno's, plain,
From Christ received he the last seal's impress,
Which he two years did in his limbs sustain.
When it pleased Him, Who chose him thus to bless,
To lead him up the high reward to share
Which he had merited by lowliness,
Then to his brothers, each as rightful heir,
He gave in charge his lady-love most dear,
And bade them love her with a steadfast care;
And from her breast that soul so high and clear

Would fain depart and to its kingdom turn,
Nor for his body sought another bier.
Think now what he was who the fame did earn
To be his comrade, and for Peter's barque
On the high seas the true path to discern.
And such was he, our honoured Patriarch;
Wherefore, who follows him as he commands,
Him laden with rich treasures thou mayest mark.

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